

Stiff COMPETITION



MORE OPEN POSITIONS THAN PHYSICIANS TO FILL THEM MAKE CONTEMPORARY PHYSICIAN RECRUITMENT A SERIOUS AND COMPETITIVE BUSINESS.

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Uncertain economic times, an aging and growing population, and too few physicians for the many open positions has made the task of physician recruitment more challenging and more important than ever. In order to find the best talent and to ensure the right fit, hospitals and private practices across the country are being forced to examine, and in some cases refine, their recruitment initiatives.

In this article we will tap several physician recruitment professionals for their insight and their advice on how to navigate the recruitment process in today's tricky environment. But first, it will serve us well to gain a general understanding of the current trends affecting the practice of physician recruitment.

Let's start by looking at the **Bureau of Labor Statistics** projection that shows jobs for physicians will grow rapidly

through 2018. Their projections began in 2010, and they estimate that during the eight year span, we will see a 21 percent increase in positions—which will equate to an additional 140,000+ jobs for surgeons and physicians. Seemingly, this is good news for physicians; but for those looking to add doctors to their groups, it is just one reason why it may be difficult to fill a new or vacant position easily.

According to Atlanta-based recruitment professional Kevin Perpetua, an Owner and Managing Partner of The Medicus Firm, a physician recruitment organization, "This projection, along with an aging and growing population, puts us in a position where there are more jobs than there are physicians to fill them." (Sheth)

Additionally, while some feel we are on an upswing, the economy still plays a

factor in the state of recruitment affairs, according to Bob Bregant, Senior Vice President of Physician Search in the Overland Park, Kansas office of Horton, Smith & Associates. "Physicians are still hesitant to move because of housing issues—they're concerned about selling their home or qualifying for a jumbo loan if they relocate," he says. (Sheth)

Finally, there is a tremendous up-tick in the number of search assignments for hospital-employed physicians. According to a report released in June by staffing company Merritt Hawkins & Associates, 56 percent of its physician search assignments are for hospital-employed physicians, which is more than double the rate of 23 percent from five years ago. It was reported in *American Medical News* that "this increase seems to reflect not only physicians' desire for a more stable practice and compensation environment, but also hospitals'

desire to align more closely with physicians because of health care reform and looming physician shortages.” (Cook)

So, with a soft economy, a projected shortage of candidates, and competition from larger hospital groups in the mix, how should a small group or private practice go about the business of recruitment?

FIRST THINGS FIRST

The first thing that needs to take place is consensus within the group. This is crucial to ensure that everyone is on the same page regarding the desire for an addition to the organization, and so that everyone is on board to work together in the recruiting process.

Bregant reports that it is equally important to have a well developed interview process in place *before* the recruiting begins. “The process should be timely and should not have any delays. Employers need to be prepared with information to provide to candidates, including a description of the practice and community. To the extent possible, contracts should be prepared in advance so they can be provided immediately after the interview (if appropriate), and all salary and benefit information needs to be documented and professionally presented to the candidate upon the visit,” he says. (Sheth)

MULTI-PRONGED OUTREACH APPROACH

In order to find qualified candidates in today’s marketplace, you must utilize multiple methods of outreach. These include traditional methods such as meeting prospective applicants at industry events, keeping in contact with those in charge of fellowship programs at targeted medical schools, and placing ads in trade publications. But it also means reaching out to candidates via online job boards, e-mail campaigns,

web-site advertising, personal letters (and personal phone calls), and social media.

A recent survey conducted by **Physicians Endoscopy** of its partnered physicians revealed that respondents that were successful in recruiting in the last five years found success via advertising in trade publications such as *EndoEconomics*, *AGA*, *DDW*, and *NEJM*. Fifty percent of respondents met with fellows at industry events and half of respondents said they used e-mail blasts and electronic campaigns to assist in recruiting. Only 25 percent of respondents reported that they utilized a recruiting firm to assist them with their efforts. We may see this number increase in the future if the gap between the number of available physicians and the number of open positions widens as projected.

WHAT TO ASK

Healthcareers.com suggests recruiters are best served if these top five questions are posed to candidates. (Cook)

- 1) Why are you looking for a new practice opportunity?
- 2) What is your training and background?
- 3) What is your current practice like?
- 4) What are you seeking in a new practice opportunity?
- 5) How will this move affect your spouse and family?

Answers to these questions should give those in charge of recruiting a sense of what the physician expects to gain from the position, whether their training matches the group’s requirements, if there are any red flags or gaps in training, the environment in which the physician is accustomed to working, and what their long-term goals are for themselves and for their family.

Sometimes where you ask a question can be just as important as what you

ask. With this in mind, you may want to invite a candidate to join you and your group in a less formal, more social setting. This provides the opportunity to see how the candidate and members of the group interact. Signs of compatibility (or incompatibility) often present themselves in these kinds of environments.

WHAT SHOULD YOU OFFER?

While each organization will have different selling points to offer candidates, those looking to hire should keep these general guidelines, outlined by Bregant and Perpetua, in mind. First and foremost, be as competitive as possible in regard to your compensation and benefits program. Second, in a competitive market you need to be prepared to act quickly. Again, this speaks to being prepared in advance, so if you identify an ideal candidate, you can provide them with an offer without haste. Finally, offer your candidates the courtesy of open and honest communication. Set the expectations with them as to how the recruitment process will work, what they can expect from you, and what you expect from them. Once established, stick to your end of the bargain by providing honest feedback and the delivery of a decision in a professional and timely manner.

Creating an environment of honesty and trust during the recruitment process sets you and your candidate up for a successful long term relationship which helps with the next important part of the employment process—retention.

References

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