Finding the Right Job in Clinical Practice or Academia
Advice for Young Clinicians and Investigators

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Over the many years of my academic career, I have often been consulted by cardiology and internal medicine trainees who are completing their education and who are now looking for the “right job” for the rest of their professional lives. I have tried to give them practical and, I hope, common-sense advice about their job searches and the negotiations that follow once they find the position that they desire. When I was asked to write this essay, my first thought was “I really don’t have that much to say about this topic.” In gathering my thoughts further, it seemed reasonable to explore the Internet for some concise and organized comments on the topic. I was pleasantly surprised when 2 Google searches on the topics “finding a job—general rules” and “finding a job—physician” produced a wealth of excellent articles with just the right amount of practical, common-sense recommendations. Thus, this article is based on my own experience over >3 decades in advising trainees about their job searches, along with material gleaned from my Internet search. The list of recommended reading at the end of this article contains the Web addresses of those sites that I found particularly helpful in defining this topic. The remarks in this article are organized around a number of simple strategy questions that, if followed in the order given, should assist any trainee in finding the right job.

Strategy Question 1: What Career Path Do You Want to Follow?

One of the wonderful things about a medical education is that it offers so many potential career paths: clinical investigation, basic science investigation, clinical practice (private or group practice), clinical practice combined with teaching, industry-related positions, hospital-based employment, and healthcare administration. Each of these paths can be followed at universities, private hospitals, government institutions, industry, and/or the armed services. This is the first thing that the physician seeking employment must weigh and decide. Each of these career paths has its own rewards and its own challenges. Before one starts a job search, it is essential to make the very personal decision concerning what type of job one is seeking.

Strategy Question 2: Where Do You Want to Live?

The answer to this question is also a personal one. It should be carefully discussed with one’s spouse or significant other. To base a career decision on geographic considerations may seem frivolous in this day and age of enhanced communications and travel, but that is to deny the primordial influence that climate, locale, customs, and mores have on our evolving maturation. What climate do you want to live in, eg, the Sunbelt or a 4-season zone? Do you want to live near the coast, in a large metropolitan area, in the country, near a university, or near specific types of recreational activities? Do you have specific cultural, religious, spousal employment, or other family needs? It is possible to restrict one’s job search to specific areas of the country that will offer the trainee the greatest potential for satisfying most or all of the desired qualities just mentioned. In selecting an area to live and work, one should also consider job market saturation in that particular area. Starting a private practice in downtown Manhattan would almost certainly be more difficult than starting a practice in a city or town with a lower density of other physicians and hence less intense competition.

Strategy Question 3: What Kind of Practice or Academic Setting Would Be Most Comfortable?

Once again, this is a question that individuals must answer for themselves. Do you want to practice in a large, multispecialty group practice in a teaching institution, or do you want to work by yourself or with a limited number of partners? Do you want to be predominantly or solely in an office setting, or do you want to be involved primarily with inpatients? How much of your time do you want to spend teaching trainees, doing research, and doing administrative tasks? Do you want to spend some of your time doing research and/or teaching medical students and trainees? Would you be more comfortable at a university hospital or at an affiliated hospital either privately owned or state supported such as the Veterans Administration system? There are literally hundreds of jobs available to physicians each year in the United States, and each one is different with respect to the percentage of time...
spent doing the tasks just outlined. Strategy question 3 is related to question 1: The kind of job setting that you seek will determine to a large degree the environment in which you will work. For example, if you would like to work as a clinician/investigator, it is more than likely that you will find a job in a university hospital or a large private referral hospital linked to a medical school. Your preferred work style also plays a role in answering the question of what practice setting you would prefer. Thus, if you desire a job that is limited to office-based practice, how large a group or partnership are you seeking? Do you want to work with midlevels or alone? Would you like your office to be close to the hospital so that you can visit easily with patients that you admit even if you are not primarily responsible for their inpatient care? Does the practice use an electronic medical record? What is the requirement for night call? How satisfied are the current partners with the state of the practice? These are only a few of the questions that must be answered before the initiation of the job search.

**Strategy Question 4: Have You Prepared Your Curriculum Vitae and Cover Letter of Inquiry About a Potential Job Opportunity?**
Your curriculum vitae (CV) is the face that you present to the work world. It should be carefully prepared and read by a knowledgeable writer. Many trainees prefer to use professional resume services to ensure that their CV is accurate and easily understood (eg, http://www.Quintcareers.com). There is a modest expense involved when a professional resume company is used. Try to avoid adding extraneous or irrelevant personal information to your CV such as high school sports or hobbies in which you engaged, religious preference, marital status, and number of children. Use an ordinary font for your CV, eg, Times New Roman. Fancy script fonts and/or unusual decorations on the CV are bound to distract the reader from the real meaning of the information supplied. Make sure that the grammar and spelling are perfect in your CV. You do want to give an impression of sloppiness or ignorance in this, your first encounter with your prospective employer or partners.

**Strategy Question 5: How Do You Find Job Openings?**
There are many ways to find job openings. Many physician jobs are posted in special sections of journals such as the New England Journal of Medicine, Journal of the American Medical Association, and Annals of Internal Medicine. Other jobs are posted on the Internet (http://www.medscape.com/home/jobcenter.html; http://www.mgma.com/jobs; http://www.acponline.org/jobs; http://www.medimorphus.com, http://www.healthsearchusa.com). Faculty at your training site may also have been contacted concerning trainees who might be interested in employment. Clinical and research faculty and certainly each trainee’s mentor may be instrumental in helping to find the appropriate and desirable position.1 Residency offices often post job inquiries from nearby communities. National meetings such as the Annual Scientific Sessions of the American Heart Association, the American College of Cardiology, and/or the American College of Physicians will have locations where both academic and private practice jobs are posted. The local county or state medical society may have job postings. Moreover, one can contact a number of academic departments or physician practices in a desired location. This can be done by faxing or mailing department or division chairs or these practices a cover letter and a copy of your CV. There are commercial services that will blanket physician practices in a specific desired location with your CV and cover letter. Of course, there is a charge for such services. Finally, there are many physician placement services that find doctors for a variety of practices. The placement service charges the practice for this service; the trainee does not have to pay anything initially, but the practice may attempt to recoup its investment by placing the cost of the placement service in the newly hired physician’s overhead budget. I found the Web sites for many such physician placement services by performing a Google search under the heading of “finding a job—physician.” I was impressed with the extensive and detailed information on the Practicelink Web site (http://www.practicelink.com).

**Strategy Question 6: What Kind of “Homework” Do You Need to Do Once You Have Identified a Job You Might Like and Have Been Invited for an Interview?**
Once you have been invited to come for an interview with members of a prospective practice, it is important to gain as much knowledge as possible about the practice, the partners, the environment, the hospitals used by the practice, the status of the financial health of the practice, and the level of happiness of the physicians and staff who work in this setting. Similarly, when invited to interview for an academic position, it is important to understand the interests and accomplishments of faculty members, commitment to teaching and mentorship, opportunities for collaboration, use of shared resources, and percent clinical effort required. A Google search should be performed involving the physician members, the name of the practice, the academic center and medical school, the hospitals involved, and the town or city where the job is located. This search is performed partly to inform the job applicant about the setting and individuals with whom he or she will be working. However, the search is also preparation for the job interview because it offers the applicant the opportunity to demonstrate how well organized and interested he or she is in this particular job.

Letters of recommendation are particularly important. Choose with great care the individuals who will write letters for you. Usually, these individuals are mentors or attending physicians with whom you have worked during your training.

Eventually, if you are offered a job, you will need to examine a number of career-related factors connected to the potential position. For example, if the job is in private practice, what are the business arrangements in the practice you might be joining? Issues such as conditions for partnership, night call requirements, educational loan repayment provisions, and many other practical business factors should be examined. If the job that is offered is in academia, other questions apply. For example, will there be protected time and seed money to start your research efforts? Will there be
a mentor to help work through the academic requirements for promotion, tenure, and many other practical matters relating to the intellectual and collegial atmosphere of the workplace (see strategy question 8).

Strategy Question 7: What Should You Do or Not Do During the Interview?
I am a believer in first impressions. Consequently, you should “dress for success.” This means wearing clean, pressed, conservative attire such as a dark suit and tie for men and a business suit for women. Be yourself. Do not provide inflated descriptions of your accomplishments, and do not try to be too clever or witty. Remember, the practice is trying to hire a physician, not a comedian. Ask questions that reflect your interest in the practice such as a description of the job requirements, the quantity of staff and midlevel assistance, the use of an electronic medical record by the practice, ease of obtaining laboratory and imaging results, the financial health of the practice or organization, the quantity of night call required, and the number of patients seen daily on average by each member of the group. Similarly, in the academic setting, questions such as startup funding, criteria for promotion, protected time, clinical responsibilities, and research space are important. Be friendly, positive, honest, and engaging. Try to give the impression that you would be an asset to the practice or institution that is interviewing you. One helpful source of information in preparing for an interview can be seen on the Wall Street Journal’s Web site under the interview advice section.

Strategy Question 8: What Do You Do When You Are Offered a Job?
If a job is offered, be prepared to negotiate the terms of the contract if you are dealing with a small or moderate-sized group. If you are dealing with a large organization such as a university or a large multispecialty organization (eg, the Mayo Clinic, the Cleveland Clinic, or Kaiser Permanente), the terms of employment will be standard for all employees. However, smaller practices offer the job applicant the opportunity to negotiate the terms of the contract. The aim of the negotiation is for both parties to finish the process with positive feelings, the “win/win” solution. Decide before the negotiations begin on what you want and what you do not want. There are different business models pertaining to different practices and different types of malpractice insurance. Be prepared to compromise, but do not accept conditions that you know will make you unhappy in the near future when you begin working. Think about what the job will look like in 5 to 10 years. Do not accept the first offer made because it makes the other party to the negotiations feel either that they offered too much at the start or that you are easily convinced to accept anything they propose. It is usually a good idea to have an attorney review the contract and discuss its terms and conditions with you before signing it. An excellent series of suggestions for negotiating a contract with a medical practice can be found at http://www.aafp.org/fpm/991100fm/24.html.

Strategy Question 9: What Should You Know in Addition to the Above if You Are an International Medical Graduate?
If you are an international medical graduate, you must pay attention to the visa requirements for the United States. Your prospective employer should be willing to offer you an H-1B visa. Some underserved positions will enable you to get an H-1B visa more easily than others. For example, employment by the Veterans Administration can lead to this type of visa under certain conditions. Some states (eg, Texas, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and South Carolina) require international medical graduate physicians to live in their state for 3 years before they can be granted a state medical license to practice. If the training of the international medical graduate has not been in one of those states, then this individual could not obtain a license to practice there immediately after training because the individual had not lived for 3 years in the state at that point in time. A more detailed discussion concerning international medical graduates has appeared earlier in this series.

Strategy Question 10: What Should You Know in Addition to the Above if You Are a Physician Seeking Part-Time Employment Because of Family Responsibilities?
Some physicians want to devote part of their workday to family concerns such as child rearing. These physicians are often seeking part-time or job-sharing opportunities. There is an organization that specializes in exactly these kinds of concerns for female physicians (http://www.mommd.com/careers.shtml). This placement service is geared to women who want full-time, part-time, flex-time, and job-sharing opportunities throughout the United States. The Web site also offers resources to start, enhance, and develop women’s medical careers oriented to graduate physicians, residents, and medical students. Male physicians interested in part-time work because of similar family concerns should not hesitate to visit this Web site. The advice given is excellent.

Recommended Internet Resources for Physicians Seeking Employment

General Rules for Job Seeking

The 10 Rules of Job Hunting: http://www.freemoneyfinance.com/2006/05/the_10_rules_of.html

Advice for Physicians Seeking Employment

How to Find the Job That’s Right for You: http://www.aafp.org/fpm/20001100/30howt.html
wikiHow: How to Find a Physician Job: http://www.wikihow.com/Find-a-Physician-Job
A Physician on Job Search and Practice: The Best Way to Find a Job for Physicians: http://www.obgyntips.blogspot.com/2007_02_01_archive.html

Disclosures
Dr. Alpert has been a consultant to Sanofi-Aventis, Merck, Bristol-Myers-Squibb, Pfizer, AstraZeneca, McNeil, Organon, Berlex, Novartis, Ciba-Geigy, Exeter CME, and North American Center for Continuing Medical Education.

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