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S-10 Physician Compensation Etiquette on an Interview

by Staff at Adventures in Medicine

One of the biggest pet peeves of Physician Recruiters is having a physician ask how much money they can make early in the interview process. Yvonne Burnett, a Physician Recruiter at Riverside Medical Center said, "There is nothing more that turns off my medical staff than a physician asking how much money they can make in the first few minutes of an introductory phone interview."

Hcareers.com states, "During the interview process, salary discussions and negotiations are almost always the last thing discussed. This is often after numerous interviews that may be rigorous in nature. When you think about it, how the whole thing works is kind of humorous."

Generally, physicians have multiple phone interviews before they are considered for an onsite interview. Costs to interview physicians are much higher than most industries. It's common for physicians to travel to interviews.

Flights, hotel, and rental car are only one part of interview costs. Physician candidates often meet several company representatives over a two-day period during the interview process, including a medical director, several physicians, administration, nurses and board members. Lastly, it's common for a prospective employer to schedule dinner with several physicians and administrators adding hundreds of dollars to the interview process.

Hcareers.com goes on to say, "Then why is it taboo to talk about salaries up front in an interview? What's wrong with discussing early in an interview how much income the candidate can make for themselves or their family to support the necessities that come with living or having the funds to support education, retirement, etc.? Aren't these good and reasonable questions? Is it really an issue of tradition or etiquette, or is it an issue of an individual's motivation? Is wanting to earn more money and talking about it up front considered shallow? Individually, it might be considered that way, although organizations have the same aspirations. So what's the difference?"

The difference is that hospitals and healthcare systems are looking for physicians who are passionate to provide quality care, and therefore money is a reward, not the primary driver. Hospitals and healthcare systems want people who are

motivated to be of service to others. This is what drives patient satisfaction and physician retention. Hcareers.com continues, "Proper etiquette says that if you want the job, and if you want a better chance at getting the salary you want then first do a good job of showing your value to the prospect employer and let salary be the last item on the agenda!"

That being said, how and when you ask about compensation depends on your situation. Some physician specialties are high in demand, and you may not have the time or energy to pursue every opportunity. In these cases, you'll need to employ a method to narrow down your options. Compensation is one way to measure whether you're interested in an opportunity. Asking about compensation early in the process may be less risky because you might be able to afford turning off a recruiter or two.

If you feel that you need to ask about compensation early in the process, Anthony Balderrama, CareerBuilder writer recommends:

Be assertive but reasonable

"Simply ask in an assertive way," says Salemi, author of "Big Career in the Big City." "You can couch it with a statement such as, 'I don't want to sound presumptuous as if I expect to already get this job, but I would like to know the salary range before proceeding.' Or, 'I am actively interviewing and evaluating offers right now which include evaluating not only the salary but personal time off and benefits, as well as perks. Would you be able to share this information with me at this point in time?'"

Prove why it's in their interest, too

"[Recruiters] don't want to waste their time, so remind them of that fact," says Alex Buznego, business development and marketing services manager for marketing organization Inktel. "Mr. Recruiter, I know your time is valuable and that the last thing you'd want to do is waste your time on a candidate who wasn't a perfect fit. With that in mind -- and I acknowledge these questions are difficult to discuss upfront -- would it be OK if we discussed some uncomfortable questions today?" You want to know about this information so you don't waste your time, and the interviewer probably feels the same way, too.

Be Polite

When you want to bring up an uncomfortable topic, whether it's benefits or work schedules, you can ease into it by asking for the interviewer's permission to ask the question, Buznego says. "It's a simple gesture and somewhat of a rhetorical one," Buznego asks. "Do you mind if I ask a couple of uncomfortable questions?" Don't worry, they are going to say yes, and it starts to break down the tension."

Wait for the Right Moment

Syndi Seid, founder of Advanced Etiquette, a business and social etiquette consulting organization, suggests job seekers wait for a chance to ask their question rather than force it into the interview.

When the interviewer asks if you have any questions at the end of the interview, Seid suggests you take this as your cue. "You then say, 'Thank you for asking. There is one item I realized we didn't discuss ...'" Seid says. "Always couch and sandwich difficult situations by saying something good and nice to start, hit them with the hard stuff, then end with something uplifting and positive."

Ultimately what matters is that you read the cues of the interviewer and ask what makes you feel comfortable and what suits the mood of the moment. As long as you're polite and ask your questions in a reasonable manner, you can walk out of the interview without regrets.

Healthcare Reform and Your Interview

What About You!

by Beth Everts

As you conduct your search for the best practice opportunity – the Affordable Care Act is changing the way potential employers evaluate candidates. In the past few editions of our newsletter we have addressed how you, as a physician candidate, can present yourself in a way that demonstrates your readiness for a value-based care system.

But...*what about you!* What are hospitals and clinics doing to prepare to help physicians practice in this new healthcare environment? This is a fair question for you to ask as you interview and visit with potential job sites. Your interviewers should be able to tell you how their staff are being trained in customer service, patient care and financial accountability in preparation for performing well in a value based system.

This new system will target two main areas - patient outcome and cost of care. In the past, a physician entered a practice

setting with the general expectation that volume = success (financial reward). In a reformed environment, success = the patient's perception of care received vs. the cost. In other words, did they get what they paid for?

Healthcare leaders should be offering training and education to hospital and clinic staff members on areas such as customer service and quality measures. They should be able to explain what steps have been taken to monitor performance and reach towards financial responsibility.

Corporate values are not just rhetoric. The ability of a health care organization to "live out" their corporate values, translates to dollars. Asking about programs addressing value-based purchasing as well as being able to explain how you are prepared to practice medicine in a value-based environment, are important aspects of the interview process.

Look for MINK at these recruitment fairs!
CareerMD in Kansas City Oct. 23
American Academy of Neurology Oct. 25-26 in Las Vegas



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