

Conducting an Effective Job or Practice Search¹

Unless you're planning to set up your own practice, you will need to know how to go about finding a position in an existing practice or with a healthcare organization; or perhaps you might look for several positions, working part-time providing psychiatric care at more than one primary care location, or working as part of a team providing collaborative care. Your search, if done well, can lead you to practice opportunities that will give you the professional satisfaction, financial rewards, and stability you desire. If done poorly, your search will probably begin again after a short period of time. Communication, planning, and patience will help you avoid making what could be a costly mistake.

TIME LINE

The length of time you search will vary depending on your experience as well as on your personal needs and preferences. If you're in a training program, you should plan to start looking for a position twelve to eighteen months prior to the completion of the program. Physicians in two-career families, or those who are looking for a specific kind of position or a specific location, should plan to start early as well. On average it takes from eight to ten months to move through the process. This does not take into account the time it takes to get a state medical license. That varies from state to state and, in some cases, can take as long as a year. Proper planning is vital.

IDENTIFY AND ASSESS YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL NEEDS

A spouse's unhappiness with the community is one of the reasons most frequently given by physicians for leaving a position after only a short period of time. Assessment of your needs and those of your family is the first step toward identifying a location and practice opportunity that is right for everyone. By taking this step seriously and involving those who will be most affected by your choice, you can reduce your risk of making a costly mistake, both financially and emotionally. This is especially important in two-career families. Identifying the right position requires that you take into account not only the location of the opportunity and the specific responsibilities involved, but also your role within the organization. For example, you need to think about whether you would be happier being an employee or whether you're the kind of person who would prefer to own a practice. This chart provides you with a few things to consider:

¹Practice Management: The Basics, Chapter 1. Office of Healthcare Systems & Financing, American Psychiatric Association, 2014.

Ownership	Employment
<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total control of the decision-making process • Choice of when, where, and how long you work • 100% of any profits • The ability to sell the business 	<p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guaranteed income and benefits paid by employer • No responsibility for employee disputes • No decision-making responsibilities for the practice • No direct responsibility for practice losses
<p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full responsibility for all business issues (taxes, payroll, employment, legal) • Responsibility for 100% of any losses incurred • Responsibility for negotiating the sale of the practice • Acceptance of the fact that the owner is the last one to be paid 	<p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little control over salary and benefits • Limited participation in practice profitability • No inclusion in equity built in the practice when it is sold • Limited control over schedule <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal participation in practice decision making

(source: *Unique Opportunities*)

Each opportunity is different and may include aspects listed on both sides of the chart. For example, a partnership option with a small group practice may give you the chance to be involved in the decision-making process while limiting your financial risk. Or you may prefer working for a number of different group practices, or community health clinics, providing psychiatric care as part of the integrated care that is being offered to patients. You need to determine what works best for you. It is essential that you discuss your options with those close to you, both at this point and throughout your search. Use the Self-Assessment Questionnaire located in Appendix A to help stimulate this process.

Curriculum Vitae and Cover Letter

Your curriculum vitae (CV) is usually the first impression you make on a prospective employer. The length of your CV will vary, depending on the nature of the position you're applying for and your years of training and experience. In any event, be as concise as possible while not omitting important information. Be certain to include all of your relevant educational, clinical (including teaching and research experience), and administrative experience. List any presentations and publications as well. If a paper has just been submitted, list it as "in submission"; if it has been accepted for publication but is not yet in print, list it as "in press."

Your cover letter should be no longer than one page and should serve to highlight your specific skills and expertise as they relate to the particular position you're applying for (pointing out why this employer would want to hire you). In it you'll want to include the date you will be available and detailed information on how you can be contacted. This is also the place to include any seemingly extraneous information that may make you more attractive to the employer. For example, it would be helpful for the employer to know that you are looking for a job in their community because it is close to your spouse's family or near your spouse's new job. Employers respond more quickly to those applicants who indicate a tie to the community. Use this to your advantage.

Your CV and cover letter should look professional, and should be printed on white or off-white paper or e-mailed directly to prospective employers. There are a number of ways you can format the information, providing you follow some basic rules:

- Choose a simple typeface, such as Arial or Times New Roman, and stick with it.
- Use bold type or all capital letters to create a separation between areas of information.
- Be consistent in your organization of information.
- Proofread your document carefully and show it to a colleague for feedback.
- Make sure the information on your CV is up-to-date and accurate.

The format can vary; content is the key. Over time your CV will grow. You may find it necessary to shorten certain sections (duties and responsibilities of previous positions, the list of your publications and presentations – provide only the most recent information, with a note that you will be glad to send the earlier information on request) in order to present the most current information in a concise, easy to read manner. You want a document that will provide an accurate image of your training and experience without overwhelming the employer. You can find a sample CV and cover letter in Appendix B.

GATHERING INFORMATION

Now that you have some ideas as to what you want to look for, as well as the tools (CV) with which to respond, you can begin the process of gathering information on available jobs and submitting your CV for consideration.

Sources of Information on Available Opportunities

Information on available jobs can be found in a number of places. The following are the most common:

- **Personal Networking:** This is one of the most effective means of locating a good practice opportunity, especially if you are interested in positions within a specific practice setting such as academia, research, or the pharmaceutical industry; or in providing clinical services to a specific patient population such as prisoners, HIV patients, or patients suffering from sleep disorders. Networking is especially helpful for those of you who want to remain in your current community. Not only do your colleagues often hear of positions before they are advertised, they may be able to provide valuable information on the employer as well. They can also tell you what they like and don't like about their current positions and how they got there. Virtually everyone you come in

contact with professionally has information that could prove to be valuable to your search. Talk to them.

- **American Psychiatric Association Website:** The APA maintains a listing of available psychiatry positions on its website at Job Central (http://jobs.psychiatry.org/home/index.cfm?site_id=13622). At Job Central you can also register for online job fairs.
- **Internet:** Clearly the Web is the place to go for job listings today. Besides the APA's job listings, there are a number of commercial sites with listings from recruiters for physicians. A simple search for the "psychiatry available positions" will provide you with a multitude of sites.
- **APA District Branches (DBs):** There are seventy-six DBs located throughout the United States (including Puerto Rico) and Canada, as well as a separate DB for military personnel called the Society of Uniformed Services Psychiatrists. Although the resources that are available vary, many DBs offer information on jobs via a classified ad section in their newsletter. In a few cases, DBs sponsor periodic job fairs. In addition, District Branch staff may be able to link you to other APA members who will have information on specific employers and communities. They may also be able to give you a general sense of the current psychiatric climate in the area. You will find list of the DBs and contact information them in Appendix E.
- **Advertisements:** In addition to the APA publications *Psychiatric News* and *Psychiatric Services*, you can find information on available jobs in a number of other periodicals directed toward the field of psychiatry (e.g., *Psychiatric Times* and *The New England Journal of Medicine*), as well as in local newspapers.
- **Professional Organizations/Meetings:** In addition to the APA, there are a number of associations for psychiatrists with specific interests or expertise. Organizations like the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the American Association of Community Psychiatrists provide information on available jobs at their annual meetings in addition to providing networking opportunities. The AACAP also has job listings on its website (<http://www.aacap.org/>). See Appendix G for an extensive list of related organizations.
- **Recruitment Agencies:** There are numerous such agencies across the country and most of them have an online presence. Look for one that is a comfortable fit and that has a staff that is responsive to your needs. There should be no cost to you to use the services of a recruitment or search firm. The following list of questions was developed by a psychiatrist for use by those interested in selecting a recruiter:
 - Who do you work for; what is the size of the organization; and how long has it been in existence? Is this an independent firm or are you a hospital-based recruiter?
 - Are you a member of the National Association of Physician Recruiters?
 - How many psychiatrists have you placed? May I contact a few as references?

- What is the financial arrangement between you and the employer; contingency or retainer? How is the amount you are paid determined; set rate or a percentage of the physician's first year salary? Have you visited the practice and met the employer?
- How will you determine who receives my CV? Will I be contacted with details on the opportunity prior to your mailing out my CV?
- **Direct Solicitation:** You have probably been receiving unsolicited communications informing you of available positions since you first entered your psychiatry residency. If an opportunity sounds interesting, contact the sender and request additional details. Even if you are not interested in the position, the information in the letter may give you some insight into the current job market. In addition to responding to direct solicitations from others, you can do your own direct solicitations; sending an email or snail mail letter of inquiry with your CV directly to employers of interest even though they may not have an advertised opening. This is especially helpful if you are limiting your search to a specific geographic locale or are hoping to work in an area of psychiatry so specialized that there are only a limited number of organizations with whom you would be interested in working. Once you've sent a letter expressing an interest in talking with them about the potential for employment, follow up with a telephone call. Although the general purpose of the call is to ensure they received your information, you should also use this as an opportunity to impress them with your interest and skills.
- **Federal Employment:** The federal government now has a central place for all its job vacancies at <https://www.usajobs.gov/>. A number of federal agencies also have their own job sites if you prefer to search that way. Here are three that we are aware of:
 1. Department of Veterans Affairs, Centralized Recruitment Office, www.va.gov/jobs/
 2. U.S. Department of State hires psychiatrists and has listings for open positions on its website <http://careers.state.gov/work/opportunities/vacancy-announcements/ims>. Just search for psychiatry.
 3. National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) has a job vacancy listing at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/about/jobs.shtml>. This site also has listings for the Department of Health and Human Services and the Public Health Service.

Sources of Information on the Current Marketplace

Information on current trends is useful in helping you to evaluate individual practice opportunities. It can also give you an idea of what you can expect to find when you go into practice in a specific area. We have listed just a few of the many available resources.

- **American Psychiatric Association:** Again, the APA is a good place to start when looking for data. You can find us online at www.psychiatry.org.
- **American Medical Association (AMA):** The AMA produces a number of reference books containing data on the practice of medicine. Perhaps the most helpful is *Physician Characteristics and Distribution in the United States*. Updated every two years, this publication contains information on trends, characteristics, and the distribution of physicians across the country. It includes information

on the number of physicians by specialty in every county and major city in the country. You can order a copy by calling (800) 621-8335 and you can find a great deal of other valuable information on the AMA website, <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama> .

- **Medical Group Management Association (MGMA):** MGMA has a wide variety of services that groups of all sizes may find helpful. One product includes an annual salary survey that looks at salaries by specialty from region to region. The survey, *Physician Compensation and Production Survey*, can be purchased online at <http://www.mgma.com/store/surveys-and-benchmarking/printed-reports/mgma-physician-compensation-and-production-survey-2014-report-based-on-2013-data> . You can get further information on MGMA by visiting their homepage at www.mgma.com .

FOLLOW-UP, PREINTERVIEW, INTERVIEW, AND SITE VISIT

Follow-Up

At this point you should have a long list of possibilities to consider; probably more than you care to spend the time or energy pursuing. It is time to eliminate those of least interest. Here is where the time you spent on self-assessment and reflection will pay off.

Employers who have received your CV will call or email you to provide you with additional details on the position, as well as to learn more about you. Use this contact with them to develop your “short list,” identifying those positions that most closely meet your needs. Pay close attention to the information they provide and then focus your questions around any issues of importance to you that were not covered. For example, “You mentioned the possibility of doing some consultation work with other physicians. That’s a big area of interest for me. How much of my time can be spent in that area?” or “My spouse is a radiologist. Do you know of any current openings in your community?” This is not the time or place to get into a detailed discussion of the compensation package. That can be a turnoff to an employer. It is acceptable, however, to ask about the salary range so that you have a feel for your potential income.

Professionalism is very important during this process. A telephone call or email not returned, poor communication skills (be sure to proofread your emails), or a less than professional attitude will not go unnoticed. It is likely that the employer has a number of candidates from whom to choose. Don’t let easily avoidable errors make the decision for you. Even if you decide you are not interested enough in the position to accept an invitation to interview, politely let the employer know that and thank them for their interest. If you handle this professionally, you will leave the employer with a good impression, which can be very important in a tight-knit professional community. If no interview is proposed, but you’re interested in pursuing the position, communicate your interest to the employer by following up with a note. Let them know of your continued interest and availability. It will be up to the employer to respond.

Since you will be gathering a large amount of information throughout this process, you'll find that keeping some kind of file can be useful to keep track of key pieces of information and help you organize your search. Things to note include:

- Name and address of the employer;
- Name, title, and telephone number of the contact person;
- How you learned of the opening;
- Date(s) of contact;
- Position title;
- Notes on specific items of interest, such as size of the group, responsibilities, call schedule, community size, salary range, etc.;
- Interview specifics (if appropriate);
- Your general feeling at the end of the conversation;
- How it rates with other positions; and
- Is follow-up necessary?

Pre-Interview

There are a few things to consider before showing up for the interview:

- **Expenses:** Before going on the interview, be sure to clarify what expenses, if any, the employer will cover and who will be making the arrangements (you or them). Will the employer pay for the expenses up front or will you pay and submit receipts for reimbursement? Will they pay to include your spouse? Your spouse should be included in at least one interviewing trip prior to your accepting a position. What will not be covered by the employer? Get this in writing if at all possible. The process will differ from employer to employer, so be sure to get a clear picture of what is expected. In some cases the employer will reimburse you for very little and you will need to determine how much the opportunity is worth to you. In getting this information up front you are protecting both yourself and the employer by reducing the risk of a miscommunication that could jeopardize any further discussions.
- **Preparation:** Prepare and rehearse your questions to ensure that you get the information that is important to you. This list of questions will be longer than that used in your initial discussions over the telephone or via email and will look at specific aspects of the position, the organization, and the community. You'll also want to consider the questions you may be asked and your answers to them. This relieves a bit of the stress and demonstrates to the employer that you are prepared and knowledgeable. This task will be easier once you've gone through one interview. Here are a few potential questions:
 - What attracted you to this particular position?
 - What skills do you bring to the organization?
 - What do you see yourself doing in five years?
 - How will your family feel about our community?

Interview and Site Visit

Whether this is your first or second interview with an employer, use your time wisely. Be sure that the interview schedule includes time to meet as many people as possible, yet leaves you enough time to evaluate the community. Here are some tips:

1. Be well rested, on time, and prepared for the interview.
2. Dress professionally (business attire); first impressions are the strongest.
3. Don't be afraid to ask questions.
4. Given the current marketplace, ask for information relating to integrated and managed care and its influence on the group. For example: the number of panels in which the practice participates; the length of time they have been participants in the panels; the number of competing practitioners/groups in the area; payer mix (x% managed care, x% private pay, x% Medicare/Medicaid); qualifications needed to be included in the provider panel (board certification, etc.); and future plans of the organization relating to the changes in the way healthcare is delivered that are underway.
5. Whenever possible, speak with the physician who is currently in the position you're interviewing for or who held the position previously.
6. Information on the compensation package should be provided during the first interview. It should not, however, be the focus of the interview. Let the discussion move in that direction naturally.
7. Keep in mind that the employer is evaluating you throughout the course of the interview. This includes any interactions you have with staff, directly and indirectly, including those during a group lunch or dinner.
8. Be open about past or current professional problems. It is best that the employer hears of any problems directly from you rather than from one of your references. However, give yourself a chance; let the employer get to know you before sharing what could be perceived as negative information. Take time at the end of the day/interview to fill them in.
9. Always investigate the position and geographic location on your own. Do not rely solely on information provided by the recruiter and/or employer. This includes contacting physicians and nonphysicians in the area to inquire about the community (economic base, level of managed care saturation, medical services, climate, school systems, etc.) and the practice. Keep in mind that there may be hidden agendas, and that in small communities it may be difficult to do this research discreetly.
10. Do not accept an offer on the spot. By the end of most interviews your mind is full of new information. Take time to carefully consider if the position is what you want.
11. Once you are home, take a moment to write a thank you note. In the note you can indicate your continued interest or your decision not to pursue the position further.
12. Review and revise your needs and priorities as necessary throughout the process, evaluating each opportunity against them, as well as against each other opportunity.
13. Investigate the state licensure requirements on your own. There is a list of State Boards of Medical Licensure in Appendix I.

FINALIZING THE DEAL

After you've completed the interview (and second and third interviews), your family has seen the community, and an employer with an attractive position has made you an offer, there are still a number of things to consider. Before saying yes, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does this position meet my needs?
- Do I see myself staying with the organization for at least five years?
- Do I like the people I will be working with?
- Am I comfortable with their treatment philosophy?
- Do we have a similar work ethic?
- Am I happy with the compensation package?
- Does the community offer what we (the family) want?
- Is my family excited by the possibility of moving there?

Remember, “trust your gut.” If it doesn’t feel right, it probably isn’t.