

Interviewing Tips for Physicians

Interviews, no matter how many times you have done them before, create stress. The old adage that you never get a second chance to make a first impression rings true and only adds to the pressure. However, the better you prepare, the more confident you will feel and the more likely you will present your best self.

In addition, interviews are your opportunity to get to know prospective employers better. With the constant flux of healthcare changes and challenges, it is important to find a job that is the right fit — one that is sustainable and best positions you for success and career satisfaction. You want to identify a proactive, forward-thinking practice that has a vision and culture that aligns with your own.

To that end, whenever possible, interview for several different positions and keep your options open. This places you in a better position to compare offers, negotiate and secure the job that is best for you. Here are a few tips to set you on the right path.

Before the Interview

1. **Reflect.** Know yourself and what you want both professionally and personally. What is most important to you? Where are you willing to compromise? Write down your vision and goals — both short-term and long-term. Identify your own strengths and weaknesses. This will help prepare you for questions you are likely to be asked.
2. **Identify and secure an experienced healthcare attorney.** You want to line this up ahead of time so that you have someone to help you review letters of intent, offers and contracts as well as guide you through the negotiation process.
3. **Do your homework.** Thoroughly research any potential employer. Learn as much as you can about the the group or organization, the person who will be interviewing you and the community. Read bios, LinkedIn profiles, online reviews and news articles. Also make note of any similarities such as shared alma maters, hometowns, colleagues, etc. These connections can help with conversation during the interview process.
4. **Anticipate questions you may be asked and think through your responses.** See the sample list at the end of this article.
5. **Prepare your list of questions.** You want them to be thoughtful, informed and relevant. Also prepare questions for other physicians in the practice, staff and anyone else in the community you may meet. Some of those questions may be the same for everyone so that you can compare responses. Others should be different and specific to individuals based on their position or role within the organization. See the sample list at the end of this article for ideas.
6. **Schedule your interview for a day you will be rested and focused.** You want to perform at your very best.
7. **Don't be on time; be early.** Walk around if possible. Take in the environment. Observe what you see and hear. This will help you to be better informed going into the interview. Also make time to review your notes and gather your thoughts.
8. **Relax.** Look at any interview as a conversation and an opportunity to get to know each other better. You both want the same thing — the right fit.

During the Interview

1. **Extend a warm, genuine greeting to everyone you meet.** This includes not just the interviewer, but the receptionist and other physicians and staff in the practice. Look each person in the eye, smile and give a firm handshake. If you are able to meet with others in the practice, ask a few questions and make conversation. Also do your best to remember the names of those you meet. Jot them down so that you can use them in conversation later as appropriate or in your thank-you notes. The power of a good greeting sets a solid first impression, sparking connections and affinity.
2. **Take good notes.** At the time, you may think you will remember everything discussed, but it is easy and natural to later forget. Detailed notes will allow you to better review, reflect and evaluate the opportunity after the interview is over.
3. **Listen.** It is a critical skill of any good physician. Demonstrate it by example in your interview. Naturally, you will be focused on giving the best response to each question and have most likely prepared answers in your head to commonly asked questions you anticipated. However, good listening allows you to garner nuances and details in the conversation that will help you to “customize” your responses, answer directly and build rapport.
4. **Demonstrate the qualities of a good physician throughout your interview process.** Investigate and listen with professionalism and empathy. Be personable, organized, conscientious and trustworthy. Display solid communication skills, your passion for practicing medicine and a strong work ethic.
5. **Be open, honest and authentic.** Don’t be afraid to say, “I don’t know,” or “I haven’t thought about that before.” As much as you prepare for any interview, you are still bound to get an unexpected or difficult question. Admit to the interviewer that it is a good question you had not thought of before, and then try to answer as best you can.
6. **Strike the right balance between confidence and humility.** Certainly share your strengths but also remain gracious and respectful. Give credit to others who have helped you along the way or with whom you have worked. You are seeking to become part of a new care team, and you want to demonstrate how well you work both independently and with others.
7. **Be human.** Let your personality shine. Find ways to connect on a more personal level. Look and listen for things you have in common with anyone you speak to during the course of your interview. You want to be memorable.
8. **Share stories.** Any interviewer can and has read your CV. Supplement it with specific stories, experiences and examples. Answer questions directly but when appropriate, also try to tie in brief anecdotes and specific experiences you have had that help to reveal your unique strengths and personality. This provides the interviewer with additional, valuable insight.
9. **Keep your responses compelling but concise.** Think 30-second “elevator speech.” Start with what is most important.
10. **If the interview occurs over a meal, eat light and don’t drink alcohol.** You want to share in the meal but keep your focus on the conversation.
11. **Don’t discuss salary in the first interview.** This is better left for a second interview or contract negotiation.
12. **Ask questions.** This goes back to your preparation. An interview is also your opportunity to get to know a potential employer or partner better. See some sample questions at the end of this article.

13. **Be aware of your body language.** Sit up straight, maintain eye contact and appear engaged in the conversation.
14. **If possible, take a tour.** This should include the practice but also the health care system or community if possible. Experience the environment firsthand. Explore it through the eyes of a physician but also through the eyes of a patient. Observe and listen at check-in, the hallways, check-out, waiting room, nurses' station and exam rooms. Can you see yourself working here?
15. **At the end of the interview, be gracious.** Sincerely thank the interviewer and anyone else with whom you meet. Secure business cards and contact information for personalized follow up. Also, before you leave, make sure you are clear on the timeline and next steps.

After the Interview

1. **Send a handwritten thank-you note within 24 hours.** This is still one of the most powerful communication tools to build relationships. Send one to each person with whom you met and make sure each message is different and personalized. Extend your gratitude and share your "elevator speech" of why you are a good fit for the position. This note should be brief — no more than two paragraphs.
2. **Block time to review and reflect.** You need to decompress and debrief soon after the interview. What is your initial gut impression? Did you feel like you would be valued and that you could contribute to the success of the practice? Review your notes and write a brief summary of the experience so that you can refer to it later, especially if you are interviewing for several different positions. Make a list of pros and cons as well as any additional questions you may have. Conduct your own SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) based on what you have learned. Don't be afraid to follow up via phone call or email with the interviewer to ask any questions for clarification on specific points.
3. **Know your priorities.** Do they match with everything you have learned about this practice? Where is there alignment and where are the potential pitfalls or gaps?
4. **Try to talk to others in the practice and community you may not have met during the interview.** This is the perfect follow-up opportunity if you still have unanswered questions or potential concerns.

Reviewing and Comparing Offers

1. **Do not generally accept a first offer.** It is intended as a starting point. They expect you to counter and negotiate.
2. **Conduct a thorough review of each offer and include your healthcare attorney in the process.** Make sure you have all of the details you need and make a list of what you are missing.
3. **Ask for clarification.** Now is the time to clear up any missing details, especially in regard to compensation. Are there bonuses? How are they decided? If you must supervise a midlevel provider, is additional compensation provided? Ask about CME reimbursement or relocation allowance. Will they reimburse you for licensing and board certification exams? Do you have all of the information you need regarding the benefits package? It is easier to address concerns or missing information up front than to course correct later.
4. **Get everything in writing.** Don't ever rely on handshakes or verbal promises.

Sealing the Deal

Before you accept any new position, be honest with yourself. Know what you want and what is negotiable. Is this job the right fit for you? If not, be wary of simply settling for less.

Interviewing is an opportunity to get to know a potential employer better and as with any new relationship, sometimes it is a fit, and sometimes it is not. Good luck with your search!

Sample Questions

Common Candidate Questions

- Why did you choose to pursue medicine?
- Why did you choose your speciality?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- How do you expect to contribute to the group?
- Describe your strengths and weaknesses.
- What are your goals?
- Describe a recent clinical success.
- Describe a clinical experience that did not go as expected and how you handled it.
- How have you resolved conflict — with a patient, with a fellow physician, with staff?
- What do patients like most about you? least?

Questions to Ask During an Interview

- Describe your perfect candidate for this position.
- Why is this position available?
- Who was the most recently hired physician in this practice and may I contact him/her?
- How long has each physician been with the practice?
- How is physician and employee turnover at this practice?
- What is the physician to staff ratio?
- Have any physicians left the practice in recent years and if so, why?
- How do you onboard new physicians? What support do you provide?
- How will you evaluate my performance?
- What are the call, coverage and productivity expectations for this position?
- Are there opportunities for advancement/partnership? If so, what is the process?
- How does the group make decisions?
- Do you have a strategic plan? How is it created? How often is it updated?
- Ask about future plans for the practice — expansion? integration? sale/acquisition?
- How is your referral base?
- Describe the culture of this group.
- What is your leadership style?

- What is the governance structure for this practice — the relationship between administration and physicians?
- What is the group's biggest challenge?
- How are the working relationships between physicians and staff? What are the greatest challenges? Do physicians hire their own staff?
- How is this practice's financial health?
- How long have you worked here? What do you like best/least? If you could change one thing, what would it be?

Additional FOMA Resources

(Link to Dennis' blog article)

(Link to Transitioning Into Practice After Residency toolkit article)