Interviewing and Selection: The Foundation of
High Performing Organizations

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Introduction

The provision of health care services is always a uniquely personal experience in spite of the technology advances that continue to dominate the health care industry. The interactions of physicians and staff with patients drive the level of patient satisfaction; and a competent staff facilitates both patient safety and quality outcomes. As our aging population places greater demands on the health care system, current projections indicate a serious shortage of health care professionals in the future. Accordingly, organizations that wish to excel will have to develop or enhance competencies in attracting and selecting the very best people in an increasingly tight employment market.

This exploratory paper characterizes the challenges of the developing workforce shortages and offers best practices for attracting, interviewing, and selecting clinical and non-clinical staff. Through research of the contemporary literature and the author’s personal experiences, this paper serves as a reference for medical practice executives wishing to put into practice human resource management techniques to hire the best people to enhance their organization’s performance.

The relevance of this topic to the medical practice executive is emphasized by its status in ACMPE’s Body of Knowledge. The Body of Knowledge for Medical Practice Management was developed by the American College of Medical Practice Executives (ACMPE), the standard-setting and certification body of the Medical Group Management Association (MGMA-ACMPE). Human Resource Management is one of the eight domains of professional competency required for successful medical group management. Within the Human Resource Management domain, there are eight tasks.
Tasks are individual job responsibilities, activities and functions. Each domain in the Body of Knowledge is defined by a series of tasks. Each task is further broken down into an outline of essential knowledge and skills required to accomplish the specific task.¹

The first task within the Human Resource Management domain addresses interviewing and selection:

*Coordinate the recruitment and orientation process of clinical and nonclinical staff.*

> *Identify recruitment sources and techniques, including internal posting, advertising, search firms and temporary agencies*

> *Recruit clinical and nonclinical staff to meet the skill mix and staff needs of the organization and its culture*

> *Recruit with an emphasis on customer- and patient-focused skills*

> *Define job scope and develop job descriptions*

> *Develop interviewing skills, ensuring regulatory compliance*

> *Establish effective selection process, including pre-employment screening, background, criminal and reference checks²*

The principle-centered approach advanced in Stephen Covey’s national bestseller, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, will provide a framework for discussing the key human resources function of recruitment and selection:

*Habit 1 – Be Proactive*
Habit 2 – Begin with the End in Mind

Habit 3 – Put First Things First

Habit 4 – Think Win/Win

Habit 5 – Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood

Habit 6 – Synergize

Habit 7 – Sharpen the Saw

Be Proactive: The Medical Workforce Forecast

The first habit of highly effective people espoused by Covey is to be proactive. A proactive approach to staffing your organization will be vital as the perfect storm of increasing demand for health care services meets the significant projected shortages in the medical services workforce.

The U.S. Census Bureau projects the population will increase by 13 percent between now and 2025 and by 2030 there will be 70 million U.S. residents (20 percent) who are 65 or older; the significance of which is that those 65 or older use twice as many physician resources as those less than 65. Further, The Commonwealth Fund projects that the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 will provide health insurance coverage to some 32 million people who are currently uninsured. Both factors will drive increasing demand for health care services in the future.
At the same time, the American Hospital Association projects a shortage of 260,000 registered nurses by 2025 and the American Medical Association reports a shortage of 130,000 physicians in that same year. Compounding the numerical shortage of physicians are the impacts of generational differences as Generation X and Y physicians seek more work/life balance through reduced hours of work compared to previous generations of physicians.

Adding to the impact on costs created by a shortage of health care workers is the rising cost of hiring employees. The Institute for Research on Labor and Employment (IRLE) at the University of California at Berkeley reports the average cost to replace an employee for all categories of workers is about $4,000. The IRLE notes that blue collar and manual workers can be replaced for an average cost of $2,000, while the average cost for managerial and professional employees may be as high as $7,000. And those costs don’t include the cost of lost productivity and training if the hire is for employee turnover.

A proactive approach to recruiting, selecting, and retaining your workforce will reduce costs and improve the quality and satisfaction in your organization.

**Begin With the End in Mind: The Hiring Checklist**

Whether the need to hire someone into your organization is due to a resignation, termination, or simply growth in the workload, there is a natural tendency to jump into action to fill the position to minimize the impact and potential disruption to the business. In smaller practices the manager might even be tasked with performing the functions of the vacant position until the position is filled. However, as they say, haste makes waste.
Planning and preparation before starting the search may actually reduce the time required to fill the position and almost certainly will improve the odds of selecting the right individual for the job. If the desired end result of the hiring process is clear to everyone at the beginning, then it is much more likely that the desired end result will be achieved.

**Job Analysis**

The duties and functions within medical practices are undergoing rapid metamorphosis as changing technology and increasing demands from the government, payors, and patients transform the way a practice does business. Accordingly, it makes sense to step back and analyze the job functions that are needed today, rather than blindly continuing to perform tasks just because they were done in the past.

Job analysis entails identifying each of the major tasks or functions performed in a particular job. After these tasks or functions are listed, a series of three questions is asked:

1. Does this task or function still need to be performed?
2. Is there someone else in the organization that could perform the task or function?
3. Can the task or function be automated?

Upon completion of this exercise, the key components of the job going forward are identified. Typically this exercise will result in the identification of some efficiencies resulting in the reorganization of work flow. Redundant duties or unnecessary components of the job are identified and eliminated.
Job Description

Having completed the job analysis, the job description can now be created or revised as appropriate. Depending on the needs of the organization, the job description may, in addition to the tasks, functions, and responsibilities include the reporting relationships, qualifications and skills, age based competencies, and physical requirements for the job.

An excellent source of job descriptions for medical practices is the Job Description Manual for Medical Practices.¹⁰

One time saving technique is to format your job description so that you can also utilize it as the performance appraisal tool. This not only reinforces the importance of each job function at evaluation time, but also effectively produces an annual review and update, if necessary, of the job description in collaboration with the person performing the job.

Position Specifications

Having created an up to date depiction of the job through job analysis and documenting that on the job description, the screening and selection criteria for the job may be determined through the delineation of position specifications. If a multiple interviewing format will be utilized including several members of the practice to interview the candidates (as discussed later in this paper), the individuals who will be interviewing candidates may be convened to discuss what qualifications, skills, experience, and traits are required or desirous for the job. The team discusses each item on the job description and determines if it is a requirement of the position or a preference. For example, a bachelor’s degree might be required for a position and a master’s degree might be preferred. Typically, the best way to manage this process is to draw a line down the
middle of a flip chart and write the “required” items on the left and the “preferred” items on the right.

Other skills or traits may be identified during the discussion such as team player, customer focused, involved in the community, etc. which should be captured as either a required or preferred characteristic. Having this discussion with all of the individuals who will be interviewing serves to cultivate a common vision of the type of individual that will succeed in the position and enhances the interview team’s ability to evaluate and recommend the best candidate for the practice.

The required characteristics for the position become the screening criteria for resumes that are submitted. In our current economy and with the advent of job posting and applications on the internet it is not unusual to receive hundreds of applications for a job opening. To narrow these applications down to a manageable number, they are screened against the required characteristics. Only those applicants who pass that initial threshold are considered for a phone or in person interview. The preferred characteristics are then used as the basis to develop the interview questions.

Synergize: Sourcing candidates

Covey has labeled his sixth habit of highly effective people synergy. When asked what synergy is, Covey states, “Simply defined, it means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

Using synergy to effectively source candidates means using multiple channels to make potential candidates aware of the position as well as identifying people who might be great prospects for the position that you can reach out to.
While the type of position being filled (clerical, clinical, management, or physician) might dictate the primary sourcing strategy, there are multiple channels to reach and recruit candidates for any level of position. The most common ways to reach candidates are through the internet, via word of mouth, and, for higher level positions including physicians, through recruiters.

The World Wide Web

The internet has transformed the way that jobs are advertised and applied for. While newspapers still have employment ads in their classified section, most savvy job seekers will go online to the newspaper’s website the evening before to get the jump on opportunities that will be in print the next day.

According to eBizMBA, the ten job websites with the highest number of unique monthly visitors are:

1. Monster.com (28.0M)
2. CareerBuilder.com (26.4M)
3. Indeed.com (17.0M)
4. Simplyhired.com (9.0M)
5. GlassDoor.com (6.0 M)
6. AOLJobs.com (4.4M)
7. SnagAJob.com (4.2M)
8. USAJobs.com (4.19M)
9. Job.com (3.8M)
10. Beyond.com (2.45M)
The cost to post a job on the websites is similar to the cost of classified advertising in a newspaper or professional journal.

A health care specific job website is the HEALTHeCAREERS Network. This is the search engine that is utilized by the MGMA Career Center. Health care workers, including physicians, utilize this site to post jobs and find employment.

Finally, a professional social networking site, LinkedIn, which started operations in 2003, is another rich source of candidates for professional positions. In January 2013 it was reported that LinkedIn had 74 million members in the United States. The LinkedIn Talent Finder tool is a search engine that filters the data on all of the LinkedIn members to identify all that meets your particular criteria, including years of experience, function, industry, education, company, etc. This allows you to identify candidates that might not be actively searching for a job, but meet your criteria for a good fit for your position.

Word of mouth

Six degrees of separation is the theory that everyone and everything is six or fewer steps away, by way of introduction, from any other person in the world. Sometimes the most effective way to identify and even vet a candidate is through word of mouth. Who does your staff or patients know who might be a good candidate? If you are searching for a physician, a call from your current physicians to their residency directors may turn up great candidates (with no recruiter costs). If enough people are helping you look you can reach a large pool of individuals, as demonstrated by the six degrees of separation theory.
**Recruiters**

The use of recruiters is typically reserved for higher level management or physician searches due to the costs involved. Searches may be on a retained or contingent basis. With a retained search one search firm is contracted to fill the position and typically receives a monthly retainer until the position is filled. When the position is filled, the firm is paid a flat fee or a percentage of the salary in addition to their expenses. Conversely, a contingent search involves no payments to the search firm until and unless the position is filled. Contingent searches are also priced as a flat fee or percentage of the salary.

Recruitment firms are useful when the practice does not have the staff or time to source and screen candidates or in those cases where it is a particularly difficult position to fill. In the case of physician recruiting firms, most firms maintain a database of available physicians. Some firms specialize in certain specialties. With approximately 240 members the National Association of Physician Recruiters is a great resource to identify and evaluate the firms.17

**Put first things first: The interviewing checklist**

Covey’s third habit of highly effective people is to put first things first.18 In the case of interviewing and selection, that means to prepare and plan for the interview even before you have screened your candidates. A checklist of items to be completed before interviewing candidates includes considering a multiple interview format, developing the interview questions with the interview team, planning the structure and flow of the interviews, finalizing the interview format, and finalizing scheduling considerations.
The multiple interview format

In many organizations it is not unusual for the hiring manager to be the only person to interview candidates. However, the author’s experience has shown that utilizing multiple interviews improves the outcome of the selection process.

One approach to the multiple interview format is to have two or more individuals or teams interview each candidate. For example, candidates might be interviewed by the hiring manager perhaps along with other managers, the peer group of the candidate’s position, and, if it is a management or supervisory position, some of the subordinates of the position. In addition to the obvious benefit of gaining the input on a candidate from multiple people with multiple perspectives, occasionally a candidate may act or respond differently with their prospective boss than with their prospective coworkers. And, if subordinates or peers are included in the hiring deliberations they normally exhibit a vested interest in helping the new hire be successful.

If the multiple interviews occur over multiple days an added benefit is the opportunity to observe if the candidate shows up on time for each interview and dresses appropriately for each interview.

Developing interview questions

As described earlier, during the initial stages of the process, position specifications are developed that describe the required and preferred qualifications, skills, and traits for the position. The required characteristics are utilized as the screening criteria for being considered as a candidate.
The list of skills and traits can then be used to develop interview questions. For example, if strong customer service skills are required in the position then an interview question might be, “Please tell me about the last time you faced an angry customer and how you handled the situation.” This is an example of a behavioral interview question which will be discussed in greater detail later. If the candidate has limited experience, a situation (perhaps something that has actually happened in the practice) is described and the candidate is asked to tell how they would handle the situation. This is an example of a situational interview question.

Staff Planning for the Interview

Once the interview questions have been selected based on the position specifications, the individuals who will be conducting the interviews can determine who will ask each question. The same question may be asked in different interview groups and it is sometimes insightful to hear if there are different responses to a question depending on whether the candidate is answering the boss or their prospective coworkers.

The interview format

The purpose of the interview is to learn as much about the candidate as you possibly can in the limited time that you will have to interview. The more comfortable that the candidate feels in the interview, the more likely you will get good insight into how the candidate thinks and behaves. If there are multiple interviewers, going around the room and introducing each person and their role in the organization is appropriate.

One technique that the author utilizes is to open the interview with a series of essentially repetitive questions. Starting with high school the applicant is asked about their activities
from that point to their current position. After the candidate tells where they attended high school, they are asked if they participated in any extracurricular activities. If they attended college, they are asked how they picked their college and major, and, again, if they were involved in any extracurricular activities.

Then, for each job that the person has held they are asked a series of the same questions. What did you like best about that job? What did you like least about that job? The name of their direct supervisor is ascertained and two more questions are asked. What would your supervisor say that they liked best about you? What would your supervisor report that they would like to change about you? If the applicant is in a supervisory position, they are asked to say the first name of their best and worst employee. For their best and worst employee they are asked what the employee liked best about their supervisor and what they would change about the applicant.

The repetitive questions typically reveal a pattern of responses. For example, involvement in extracurricular activities in school usually is followed by the individual’s involvement in community and professional activities later in life. If the applicant held leadership roles in school, they typically will report on leadership roles after graduation. From job to job, what a person likes, and dislikes, tends to be consistent. If the job that you are interviewing the candidate for primarily involves tasks that the candidate has stated they enjoy doing, they will likely be very successful in the position because the job consists of things the candidate enjoys. If the job primarily involves tasks or responsibilities that they have said that they dislike performing in the past, no matter how badly they want the job, they are unlikely to be successful in the long run because the job comprises tasks or duties that the candidate dislikes. The important distinction to make is
how much of the time on the job is related to functions that liked or disliked. It is unlikely that there is any job where a given person enjoys every single thing about their job.

The questions about what their previous supervisor liked and would want to change about the candidate reveal self-awareness, as well as honesty. If a candidate reports that all of their previous supervisors had no suggestions for improvement; that they were the perfect employee in every way, then there is possibly a lack of self-awareness or the candidate is not fully disclosing what they have been told in the past. The advantage of asking the candidate for the name of their supervisor and framing the question as, “If I asked ‘name of supervisor’ what they would change about you” it implies that you will make that call and encourages the candidate to answer truthfully.

### Scheduling

The timing of the interview is an important component to getting good information to make the best hiring decision. Interviews should be scheduled when the interviewers have time and are not distracted by the press of other responsibilities. Typically, Mondays are not a great day to interview. Out of respect for the candidate, and to set the tone for how the practice operates, interviews should start promptly on time and end on time.

For preliminary telephone interviews, some practices utilize the “inconvenience” interview. This is an interview scheduled at 9 pm on Friday night or 6 am on Saturday morning. Availability for such interviews signals flexibility and desire to get the job.
Seek first to understand, then to be understood: The Interview

Covey’s fifth habit is perhaps the most relevant to the interviewing and selection process. The objective is to understand the candidate’s fit for the job, and to communicate to the candidate the culture of the workplace and expectations of the position.

Behavioral interviewing

Behavioral (experience-based or patterned behavioral) interviews are past-oriented in that they ask respondents to relate what they did in past jobs or life situations that are relevant to the particular job relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities required for success. The idea is that past behavior is the best predictor of future performance in similar situations. By asking questions about how job applicants have handled situations in the past that are similar to those they will face on the job, employers can gauge how they might perform in future situations. Sample behavioral interview questions are discussed below.

Communication skills

Particularly if you are utilizing the multiple interview format and have employees that may not have experience interviewing others, it is important to brief the interview team on key communication skills in interviews. Interviewers should spend most of their time listening rather than talking. In addition to the words that the applicant is speaking, interviewers should pay attention to nonverbal communication such as body language, facial expression, and eye contact.
Interview questions

Creation of the interview questions has been previously discussed. The questions should be designed to learn what the person likes and doesn’t like to do as well as how they would handle routine and non-routine situations in their job.

During the course of exploring the applicant’s work history and asking what they liked best and least about their previous jobs, a clear pattern is likely to be exposed. If the job you are hiring for has a lot of components of tasks or responsibilities that the applicant enjoys doing, then they likely will love doing the job. Alternatively, if the job includes significant time associated with tasks or responsibilities that the applicant dislikes doing, then no matter how motivated they are to get the job, they are not likely to gain a lot of job satisfaction from the position.

Common interview questions

In addition to questions regarding previous jobs previously discussed and behavioral questions related to specific tasks in the job, there are also general questions that will allow the interviewers to better get to know the candidate. Appendix I lists 100 common interview questions as reported on the monster.com website. 20

Physician interview questions

When interviewing and selecting physicians for the practice, the same components previously discussed of using an interview team, defining the position requirements with the team, interview preparation, and conducting the interview utilizing behavioral questions should be utilized. The behavioral questions should be designed to assess core
competencies by the physician candidate in (1) teamwork and collaboration, (2) caring and compassion, (3) communication skills, (4) leadership, and (5) judgment and problem solving. Appendix II lists sample physician interview behavior-based questions.

Interview red flags

There are two types of red flags associated with interviews: those related to the interviewee and those questions or topics that might be asked by the interviewer that are not legally permitted to be asked of a candidate. If you are using physicians or front line staff on the interview team, they likely have not had any training on the do’s and don’ts of interviewing. During the planning process, it is important to train everyone involved on the legalities of interviewing a candidate.

Candidate red flags

Possible red flags associated with a candidate include excessive job hopping or unexplained gaps in employment. While the person who starts with a company right out of school and stays until they retire is certainly not the norm any more, if a candidate has a history of changing jobs every year or two, why would you think that they will stay more than a year or two with your practice? And, do any gaps in employment reflect unemployment, or time in prison? Be sure to ascertain a complete history of your candidates.

Other red flags include inflated accomplishments or an inability to answer your questions. If a business office manager reports to you that they have maintained their accounts receivable at twenty days, then they should be able to describe to you exactly how they accomplished that feat. If they are unable to describe how they did it, how will
they be able to do it for your practice? And, if you are using behavioral questions, you are not asking questions that are impossible to answer. If a candidate does not answer a question, it is human nature for the interviewer to jump in after a few moments of silence. If a candidate does not respond to your question, sit patiently until they do respond. If they say that they can’t come up with a response right at that moment, then tell the candidate that you will come back to it later in the interview and make yourself a note to do that.

Finally, in the course of reviewing each of the candidate’s jobs and their supervisor at those jobs, if the candidate hated most of their previous jobs, or if they report that they had difficulty getting along with most of their bosses, it certainly raises the question about how the experience will be different in your practice.

**Red flags for the interviewer**

Utilizing an interview team can be an extremely effective process for making the best selection for a job. However, it is incumbent on the manager to make sure each person involved in interviewing understands what legally can and cannot be asked.

All questions should be related to the specific job requirements. If a question relates directly to job performance, it is a fair question. However, you may not ask about:

- Age or anything that would indicate it, such as year of graduation
- Marital status or sexual preference
- Children or children’s ages
- Worker’s compensation claims filed
- Arrests
• Place of birth or present residence
• Citizenship
• Length of residence in a particular location
• Other languages spoken or written, unless job appropriate
• Child-care arrangements
• Disabilities
• Attendance at religious services or which one
• Religious, political, or organizational affiliations
• Type of car owned-driven
• Credit or financial status
• Maiden name

An excellent source of up-to-date information about federal employment laws is www.dol.gov/elaws.

Think Win/Win: Selection

Covey’s fourth habit is to “Think Win/Win”.

*Win/Win is a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interactions. Win/Win means that agreements or solutions are mutually beneficial, mutually satisfying. With a Win/Win solution, all parties feel good about the decision and feel committed to the action plan.*

Win/Win in selection is hiring the person who is the right fit for the practice and the practice is the right fit for the candidate. With the high unemployment rate in today’s
economy it is not unusual for applicants to want and to accept a job, even if it is not a good fit for them. The more desperate candidates may say or promise anything to regain employment and a paycheck. However, if they are not a good fit for your practice, the probability of their long term success is questionable.

**Reference checking**

References provided by the candidate can be helpful, but it should be no surprise that candidate supplied references are almost universally positive about the applicant. Previous employers can be a better source of information, but many times the human resources department sticks to “name, rank, and serial number”. **Never** contact a previous employer, and certainly not the current employer, without the express permission of the candidate.

One technique, in addition to contacting human resources or a previous supervisor, is to call individuals in the practice or hospital that previously employed the individual. If you are interviewing a surgeon, a call to the OR manager or nurse manager of the surgical floor telling them that the surgeon is interested in a position with you and asking them how the surgeon is to work with or what his/her patients say about them may provide useful information.

**Internet searches**

The ease and quickness of an internet search of a candidate’s name makes it a valuable tool in the selection process. Public information from newspaper articles, Facebook, LinkedIn profiles, etc. may provide additional information not available to you otherwise by simply “Googleing” the name of the candidate. For physician candidates, search
healthgrades.com, vitals.com, rateMDs.com, and zocdoc.com, among others, for patient ratings and additional information.

**Credit report and criminal history**

While an employer can certainly do it themselves, there are many companies that will perform background searches very cost effectively. Typically the cost is from $20 to $50 per search and some companies offer a monthly fee for unlimited access. Most of the companies offer a menu of options to choose from. Typical choices are:

- Criminal record checks
- Credit reports
- Driving record
- Employment verification
- Education verification
- Social security verification
- NPDB (for physicians)
- Medicare/OIG exclusion (a must if your practice receives government funds)

While these services are not cost effective to screen for every applicant unless you are incurring significant interview costs for travel, etc., the background check is certainly a best practice prior to making a hiring decision.

**The right fit**

Through the interview planning process the current needs and skills of the position have been identified. Utilizing multiple stakeholders in the practice to interview candidates provides multiple viewpoints as well as multiple views of the candidates. The applicant’s
description of what they have enjoyed in each of their past jobs and what they disliked
gives a good picture of what the individual enjoys about their work and what they do not
enjoy doing. Behavioral interview questions will give you a good picture of how the
candidates have handled situations and challenges in the past.

As a result of the planning, team approach, and insight into the job applicants previous
behaviors, each candidate can be measured against the “ideal” candidate characteristics
defined at the beginning of your process. The best suited candidate that meets all of the
minimum criteria can be selected with some confidence that they will be the “right fit”
for your practice.

Summary
This paper has described how to achieve the tasks associated within the Human
Resources domain of the Body of Knowledge to coordinate the recruitment of clinical
and nonclinical staff. Utilizing habits associated with highly effective people to
categorize the steps in the interviewing and selection process, a comprehensive approach
to finding the right fit for your open position is detailed.

Beginning with the end in mind, significant time and effort “up front” should be used to
clearly define and update, as appropriate, the needs of the job and the specifications of
the ideal candidate. This information is then shared with the interviewing team to assure
that everyone is looking for the same attributes in the candidates.

Synergies are accomplished in sourcing candidates by using multiple channels to reach
possible candidates including World Wide Web resources, word of mouth advertising, as
well as recruiters, when appropriate.
Putting first things first, the interviewing team develops interview questions, determines the interview format, learns good communication skills, and sets up the interview schedule.

Seeking first to understand and then be understood, candidates are interviewed using questions designed to learn what the candidate enjoys in their work as well as how they have responded to situations in the past. Time is spent with the candidate helping them get a feel for the culture of the practice.

Finally, candidate selection is made with an eye towards it being a “win” for the practice and a “win” for the new employee. Following this process for interviewing and selection will allow medical practice executives wishing to put into practice proven human resource management techniques the opportunity to hire the best people to enhance their organization’s performance. The knowledge and skill to interview and select the right candidate is truly the foundation of high performing organizations.
Appendix I

100 Potential Interview Questions

Basic Interview Questions:

• Tell me about yourself.
• What are your strengths?
• What are your weaknesses?
• Why do you want this job?
• Where would you like to be in your career five years from now?
• What's your ideal company?
• What attracted you to this company?
• Why should we hire you?
• What did you like least about your last job?
• When were you most satisfied in your job?
• What can you do for us that other candidates can't?
• What were the responsibilities of your last position?
• Why are you leaving your present job?
• What do you know about this industry?
• What do you know about our company?
• Are you willing to relocate?
• Do you have any questions for me?

Behavioral Interview Questions:

• What was the last project you headed up, and what was its outcome?
• Give me an example of a time that you felt you went above and beyond the call of duty at work.
• Can you describe a time when your work was criticized?
• Have you ever been on a team where someone was not pulling their own weight? How did you handle it?
• Tell me about a time when you had to give someone difficult feedback. How did you handle it?
• What is your greatest failure, and what did you learn from it?
• What irritates you about other people, and how do you deal with it?
• If I were your supervisor and asked you to do something that you disagreed with, what would you do?
• What was the most difficult period in your life, and how did you deal with it?
• Give me an example of a time you did something wrong. How did you handle it?
• What irritates you about other people, and how do you deal with it?
• Tell me about a time where you had to deal with conflict on the job.
• If you were at a business lunch and you ordered a rare steak and they brought it to you well done, what would you do?
• If you found out your company was doing something against the law, like fraud, what would you do?
• What assignment was too difficult for you, and how did you resolve the issue?
• What's the most difficult decision you've made in the last two years and how did you come to that decision?
• Describe how you would handle a situation if you were required to finish multiple tasks by the end of the day, and there was no conceivable way that you could finish them.

Salary Questions:
• What salary are you seeking?
• What's your salary history?
• If I were to give you this salary you requested but let you write your job description for the next year, what would it say?

Career Development Questions:
• What are you looking for in terms of career development?
• How do you want to improve yourself in the next year?
• What kind of goals would you have in mind if you got this job?
• If I were to ask your last supervisor to provide you additional training or exposure, what would she suggest?

Getting Started Questions:
• How would you go about establishing your credibility quickly with the team?
• How long will it take for you to make a significant contribution?
• What do you see yourself doing within the first 30 days of this job?
• If selected for this position, can you describe your strategy for the first 90 days?

More About You:
• How would you describe your work style?
• What would be your ideal working environment?
• What do you look for in terms of culture -- structured or entrepreneurial?
• Give examples of ideas you've had or implemented.
• What techniques and tools do you use to keep yourself organized?
• If you had to choose one, would you consider yourself a big-picture person or a detail-oriented person?
• Tell me about your proudest achievement.
• Who was your favorite manager and why?
• What do you think of your previous boss?
• Was there a person in your career who really made a difference?
• What kind of personality do you work best with and why?
• What are you most proud of?
• What do you like to do?
• What are your lifelong dreams?
• What do you ultimately want to become?
• What is your personal mission statement?
• What are three positive things your last boss would say about you?
• What negative thing would your last boss say about you?
• What three character traits would your friends use to describe you?
• What are three positive character traits you don't have?
• If you were interviewing someone for this position, what traits would you look for?
• List five words that describe your character.
• Who has impacted you most in your career and how?
• What is your greatest fear?
• What is your biggest regret and why?
• What's the most important thing you learned in school?
• Why did you choose your major?
• What will you miss about your present/last job?
• What is your greatest achievement outside of work?
• What are the qualities of a good leader? A bad leader?
• Do you think a leader should be feared or liked?
• How do you feel about taking no for an answer?
• How would you feel about working for someone who knows less than you?
• How do you think I rate as an interviewer?
• Tell me one thing about yourself you wouldn't want me to know.
• Tell me the difference between good and exceptional.
• What kind of car do you drive?
• There's no right or wrong answer, but if you could be anywhere in the world right now, where would you be?
• What's the last book you read?
• What magazines do you subscribe to?
• What's the best movie you've seen in the last year?
• What would you do if you won the lottery?
• Who are your heroes?
• What do you like to do for fun?
• What do you do in your spare time?
• What is your favorite memory from childhood?

Brainteaser Questions:

• How many times do a clock's hands overlap in a day?
• How would you weigh a plane without scales?
• Tell me 10 ways to use a pencil other than writing.
• Sell me this pencil.
• If you were an animal, which one would you want to be?
• Why is there fuzz on a tennis ball?
• If you could choose one superhero power, what would it be and why?
• If you could get rid of any one of the US states, which one would you get rid of and why?
• With your eyes closed, tell me step-by-step how to tie my shoes.

Appendix II

Physician Peer Interview Behavior-Based Questions

Teamwork and Collaboration

1. Describe a situation in which you and another physician with whom you worked did not get along. Tell me about that situation and how it worked out.

2. When you have been part of a group of physicians in the past, how have you determined whether the group was working well together? Please give me specific examples.

3. Describe a time when you were part of a physician group that did not work well together. What actions did you take to improve the situation? What was the outcome?

4. Tell me about your best practice situation with your colleagues in terms of how everyone worked together, and what specifically made it the “best”?

5. Tell me about a time when you were part of a highly productive and well working physician group. What role did you play in making the team successful?

6. Describe a time when you received feedback to improve your performance. How did you respond and what steps did you take to improve?

7. Tell me about a collaborative effort you participated in during your prior medical group experience or residency. What was your specific contribution?

8. Tell me about a time when you recognized a member of your clinical care team for doing a job well. What was the situation and how did you recognize this person?
9. Describe a time when you had to give constructive feedback to a physician colleague or a member of your clinical care team. How did you approach the situation? What was the result?

10. Tell me about a time when as a physician you created and supported a collaborative work environment. What did you do? What do you believe are the most important things for physicians to do to create a collaborative work environment?

11. Describe to me the specific behaviors you use to create an environment of cooperation and collaboration. Provide an example of how you have used these behaviors in the past.

12. Tell me about a time when you observed physician behaviors that were not supportive of a cooperative and collaborative work environment. What specifically happened and what did you do about it? Tell me what you learned from this experience and what recommendations you have for coaching a physician with these types of behaviors.

**Caring and Compassion**

1. Tell me about a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty for a patient. What happened and what was the outcome?

2. Describe specific techniques you have used to convey and communicate that you care for patients and their clinical outcomes.

3. What clinical situations have caused you the greatest frustration, and how did you deal with them? Please give me specific examples.
4. Describe a time when you have had to deliver bad news to a patient and/or family. How did you specifically go about doing that, and what was the outcome?

5. When you have a brand new patient, describe your approach to creating a first impression.

6. Patient loyalty is key to a successful practice. Tell me what techniques you believe are important to creating patient loyalty to you and your medical group.

7. “Word of mouth” can be an important marketing tool to medical practices. Tell me specifically how you have contributed or generated a positive patient word of mouth during your involvement in previous medical practices.

Communication

BEHAVIOR-BASED QUESTIONS:

1. Describe a time when you realized you had to change a way you communicated to a staff member or fellow physician. What did you do, and what was the result?

2. Tell me about a time you realized you had to change a way you were communicating to patients. Please tell me what change you made and how that worked out.

3. Tell me about a time when a patient-care team member (receptionist, nurse, other office staff) told you something that let you know you were doing a good job or that you needed to do a better job. What was the situation? What did they tell you and how did you respond?

4. What do your patients like best about you? Tell me specifically how you achieve this.
5. Tell me about a time when you could have done a better job with a patient or family. What happened? How did you handle the situation? What did you learn? What have you done to improve in this area?

6. Tell me about your best physician/nurse relationship. How did you contribute to that relationship?

7. Have you ever lost a nurse because of a personality conflict? Tell me what happened. Based on what you have learned, what would you do differently next time?

8. Have you ever left a position because of a personality conflict with leadership or a fellow physician? Please describe what happened.

COMMUNICATION SKILL AND KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONS:

1. Please describe how you would respond to this scenario: A patient calls for his PSA results on a Tuesday. He had his labs drawn a week previously. You request the chart to compare to prior levels, but you do not get the chart before leaving on vacation for two weeks. The chart and the PSA sit on your desk for two weeks until you return, although the patient was told he would be called within 24 hours with his results. What do you say to this angry patient when you realize what has happened? The PSA is elevated, but no more so than the year prior.

2. A healthy 25-year-old female comes to your office and asks you to order a CA-125 blood test. Tell me how you proceed.
3. A previously healthy, 58-year-old male comes to your office complaining of general fatigue and frequent urination. Laboratory evaluation reveals blood glucose of 245, with no other abnormalities. You call the patient to review your findings. Tell me about your conversation.

4. What techniques do you use to assure that each patient understands your explanations of medical condition and treatment?

**Leadership**

1. Tell me about a time you had to convince your physician colleagues to do something differently. How did you go about getting that done? What were the results?

2. When you have had to lead change at your clinic, how did you go about doing it? What was the outcome?

3. Tell me about an important goal you have set for yourself since residency and how you have gone about accomplishing it.

4. Describe a great physician mentor you have had and what specifically made him or her great. Include the relationship you currently have with that person.

5. Tell me what you have done in the past to improve the performance of your coworkers, including staff and nurses.

6. Tell me about a time when you have coached a member of your staff to improve performance. What was the situation? What did you do? What were the results?
7. In an age of nursing shortages, tell me what specifically you have done to keep your high-performing nurse.

8. As a physician, you are recognized as a leader. The physician leader sets the tone for the work environment and how care is delivered to patients. Give me specific examples of how you have communicated with your staff and nurses to establish the success of your practice?

9. Tell me about the best physician leader for whom you have worked. What specifically did this person do? What skills did you learn from him or her, and how have you incorporated these skills into your personal leadership style?

10. Tell me about a time when you were considered the “physician in charge” or “physician leader.” This could be from your past practice or residency. What did you do to ensure that the group you led worked as a team and communicated well? How did you recognize and reward top performers?

11. Describe the work environment you have enjoyed most in your past. What did you like about it? How did you contribute to this positive work environment?

**Judgment and Problem Solving**

**BEHAVIOR-BASED QUESTIONS:**

1. Tell me about the busiest time you have ever experienced in a clinical work environment. How did you respond?
2. Tell me about a clinical mistake you made as the treating physician. What happened, and did the situation work out?

JUDGMENT SKILL AND KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONS:

1. While on a call you receive a phone call at 10 p.m. from a nursing home where your colleague admits his patients. The nurse informs you that one of your colleague’s patients has developed shortness of breath over the past several hours. The patient is an 85-year-old male with a history of moderate dementia but no other known medical problems except for hypertension. His O2 sat is 91%, RR is 24, pulse is 100, and his temp is 99.0.

   • Tell how you would work through this problem over the phone and what you would do next.

   • You learn that a call was placed to the daughter who has the DPOA for healthcare decisions, and she has requested that nothing be done and that only comfort measures be undertaken. You believe the patient has a treatable cause for his symptoms. How would you proceed?

2. You have 12 patients booked for a full morning. You are running on time and a 45-year-old male comes to your office with a chief complaint on your schedule as “heartburn.” As you interview this patient you realize that his “heartburn” is periodic non-exertional chest pressure. He has had no symptoms for the last 12 hours.

   • How would you proceed?

3. You see a 39-year-old female for abdominal bloating, cramping, and dyspeptic symptoms of three weeks’ duration. You diagnose a functional bowel condition and recommend over-the-counter symptomatic treatment. She returns in one week with
similar symptoms but denies fevers, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or weight loss. You provide her an empiric trial of a PPI and a fiber supplement. She tries this for a week and does not improve. She seeks a second opinion on her own. An abdominal/pelvic CT is done, which reveals probable metastatic ovarian CA. The patient changes physicians and is upset that you didn't make an earlier diagnosis.

• Tell me if you would have proceeded differently and how.

Endnotes


14 http://www.mgma.com/jobs/.


17 http://www.napr.org/


Bibliography


