



Got an interview?

These tips can help you navigate the job interview dance.

WE HAVE ALL BEEN ON DINNER DATES—and know there are lots of decisions and choices to be made before and while dining. Physicians looking for their first job or their next job often conduct business over a meal. Sometimes the meal is introductory; sometimes it's to close the deal or celebrate a new beginning.

Let's analogize each phase leading up to, during and following the meal to a physician's job interview process.

Picking the restaurant



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Two main issues are generally relevant: location and type of food. Geography is obviously an important consideration when deciding where to start or continue a career. Generally, the more flexibility a physician has with respect to the

location of a job, the more potential opportunities. Urban, suburban and rural are the general characteristics for most job settings. However, in a post-COVID endemic world, telehealth and telemedicine options may provide an additional level of flexibility that minimizes the importance or deterrence of a specific job's location.

There are several types of practice settings that you need to consider. The first decision is if you'd prefer a facility employer or a private practice setting. In the facility setting, you may work for an academic medical center, a community hospital or a sub-acute facility. A private practice setting could be a traditional physician-

owned private practice, a practice that is an extension of the local hospital or a medical practice owned by private equity.

Just like when picking a restaurant, each physician has their own preference and desires. Unlike a restaurant, the choice you make will hopefully last longer than a several-hour meal.

Selecting the attire

Very few restaurants have a mandatory dress code. As a physician choosing a job, you'll want to be sure you're comfortable in the environment you are joining. Most physicians do not want to join an employer where there is significant staff turnover. Similarly, an employer that "looks good" but is woefully inefficient or beset by internal struggles will likely not be a good long-term fit.

A cocktail at the bar

Many dates start with a drink at the bar because the restaurant is running behind on the reservation, the tables are not getting cleared timely, or the bar provides a more casual opportunity to get to know one another. A physician is well-served to spend that time getting an initial read of the employer. An initial impression may not be the lasting impression, but it can set the tone for the remainder of the evening.

Appetizers

Starting a meal with a few tasty appetizers is always a good idea. From a professional perspective and as part of the job interview, the employer and prospective physician hire may each identify a few issues they would like to “pressure test” with one another. These are likely feel-good issues that can set the tone for the professional relationship and ensure the employer and physician candidate see the opportunity to work with one another to be mutually appetizing.

The main course

This is when the dinner date starts to get more serious. It is time to identify what you’d like and what the employer is willing to offer.

There are two sides to the menu you should consider. First, identify each of the things you’d like to have in an ideal scenario. Starting salary is important, obviously. Periodic salary increases for cost of living or otherwise is an added bonus. Speaking of bonuses, are there bonus opportunities provided? If so, are the bonus opportunities attainable and realistic? How frequently will the bonus, if earned, be paid? Are the bonuses pro-rated if the physician does not remain with the employer for the entire contract, calendar year or term of employment? If the bonus is based on collections, are trailing collections included?

Work/life balance is also a critical consideration. This includes on-call frequency (even if there is additional pay for taking extra call). How many weekends and weeknights are physicians expected to work, and is that comparable to peers?

Moonlighting is another factor. Some employers just won’t allow it, even if the moonlighting activity has no negative impact on the physician’s main job responsibilities. Similarly, intellectual property ownership can be an important (and lucrative) item that needs to be protected.

Be mindful of the non-competition, non-solicitation and non-interference clauses—especially in light of recent FTC rules against non-competes. A non-solicit may prevent you from recruiting former staff or colleagues to work in a new professional environment.

Dessert

A good meal is often followed by a sweet dessert. For the physician on a job interview, consider one or two things that would make the prospective job a little sweeter. This could be a signing bonus, retention bonus, moving expenses or reimbursement for tail insurance. These are issues that could be the “cherry on top.” Don’t be overly aggressive, however, in selecting desserts. In addition to potentially causing a stomachache (for both the prospective employer and the physician), asking for too much can result in sour feelings and a reluctance for the employer to move forward.

The tab

Unlike the traditional dinner date where one party may be reluctant to pick up the tab or the parties agree to split, the employer should pick up the dinner tab as well as any other incidental expenses you incur for the interview if you’re coming from out of town. This is usually discussed up front to avoid any confusion.

Of course, it is appropriate and expected that you’ll say thank you for the meal—and it’s best to follow up in short order to discuss potential next steps and address any and all follow-up questions.

It is usually a positive experience to break bread with a prospective employer. A lot can be learned and shared in this more informal setting, and it can create the foundation for a long-lasting and healthy professional relationship. Bon appetit! •

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