



In pursuit of work/life balance

Here's what to consider when searching for your next job.

PHYSICIANS ARE THE PINNACLE OF THE HEALTHCARE DELIVERY SYSTEM. It's a role with an enormous amount of pressure, and burnout is real.



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One way to help avoid burnout is to ensure you pursue a healthy work/life balance. What that looks like depends on your age, career stage, specialty, family status, practice setting, geography and more.

Consider these important topics when searching, interviewing or reviewing a potential employment agreement.

Work days

For many physicians, it's helpful to imagine there are 10 shifts available to work each week: an a.m. and p.m. shift Monday through Friday. How many of those shifts will you work each week? Make sure your employment agreement specifies how many days a week you'll be expected to work.

Work hours

For physicians, there is usually no "typical" day. Try instead to understand the times the first and last appointments can be scheduled in a day, and make sure that is captured in your employment agreement. Be aware of time-adding requirements such as arriving

30 minutes before the first scheduled procedure or completing all administrative responsibilities before leaving for the day.

Location

Your employer may have multiple offices or facilities. Clarify in your interview and employment agreement where you'll be expected to work—and where you won't be expected to work without mutual agreement. It is similarly important to address if you'll be expected to work in multiple outpatient locations in a single day.

Call

Call frequency is often the most common example to describe the challenges physicians have for maintaining work/life balance. Understand if you'll be on call for multiple hospitals at the same time or be available for backup call in the event patient demand or acuity requires an additional physician.

Family support

Two-physician households are quite common. Coordinating offices, locations and commutes and ensuring call schedules are complementary can be challenging. Address these issues with your potential employer during your job-search process.

Time off

In addition to call, paid time off (PTO) is the most obvious potential example to structure a healthy work/life balance. PTO, however, may not be as straightforward as it seems. For instance, what's paid and what's not? A hospitalist working 15 to 17 shifts a month has the balance of the month "off" but is likely not getting paid for those days. A physician who is paid exclusively for productivity may be less inclined to take off because no work means no pay.

Every employer handles time off differently. Ensure your employment agreement clearly specifies how time off works and how your compensation may be impacted.

Compensation

Many younger physicians start their post-training career hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt. That makes it tempting to take extra call or to add more patients if it means more money. A physician with a set base salary without bonus opportunities will likely be less inclined to take on extra shifts.

Your employment agreement should delineate the parameters for a healthy work/life balance. This sets your expectations appropriately and creates boundaries for the employer. It ultimately creates a win-win scenario—and, most importantly, should ensure excellent patient care is provided.

A successful professional relationship integrates your and your employer's expectations with realistic quality of life and compensation possibilities. •

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