

Finding the right job post fellowship: The community experience

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“Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.” –
M.K. Gandhi

When I look back at the years passed, this famous quote comes to life. Twelve years in the making, I am ready to embark upon the journey I always wanted to: heal the wounded. In our world this would mean treat and possibly cure cancers and blood disorders.

I recently started working with US Oncology, and hopefully some of my personal experiences can be of help to my colleagues who are just starting their journey. The first question to ask during fellowship is where your heart lies: academic medicine or private practice. These are two completely different career paths and it is imperative to decide early on to see what fits the best. I personally have, from when I started residency wanted to practice in the community. However, the process doesn't end here, it just starts! For those looking for a private practice job, it could be relatively easy or really tough depending on the type of practice, compensation and most importantly location.

The very first time I thought of starting a job search was towards the beginning of my second year of fellowship (ours is a 3 year program). Unfortunately, the economic slump had hit the medical job market, especially oncology. The revenue had decreased, and the job market was fierce and competitive. Complicating matters, I had specific geographic areas and job distinctions in mind. The first step was to create an attractive CV; one with substance, but style too. A good CV, in my opinion is more important for academic centers than private practice. The second step was to go online and post CV on sites that assist with job searches. There are several on the web and the bottom line is to post your information on multiple sites. I can guarantee you will be flooded with phone calls from recruiters within twenty-four hours of doing so. The first questions are usually basic and help in selecting the recruiters you want to work with.

It is also very important to have geographic preference clarified early on. In my experience, recruiters work the best for smaller practices and the ones outside major metros as the simple law of supply and demand applies. If you're looking for metropolitan cities and/or well-established big groups, it is best to go through them directly. Unfortunately I learned this the hard way, after spending 4 months looking for a job! As there are more applicants than jobs in lucrative areas, major practices like to have their own 'in-house' personnel to avoid paying third party recruiters.

The first interview I landed through a recruiter was in a small town, but I was well prepared. It was a good practicing ground where I learnt to ask the right questions and to look for the right things. Before my second interview, I was offered a position. This put me in a dilemma, as I wanted to practice in a major metro. I bought some time by requesting them to wait but finally, after a month, let the opportunity go. It was a difficult decision as my future was uncertain and I had let go off an offer.

As my interview season became busy I became clearer in my mind as to what exactly I wanted. After a few months of interviewing, I stopped accepting any more unless they were from the particular metro I was looking for. It was a gamble, but it worked. I interviewed with three major Oncology practices in Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex and ended up with my first choice. I believe what helped me the most was strong

recommendations from my faculty, experience as the chief fellow and being honest. When you interview in addition to a good, hard working physician practices want to make sure that you are a good team player. Joining a group practice is akin to marriage and you want to be absolutely sure you are comfortable working with them.

So, here I am, having finished my fellowship and about to embark upon a journey with the new job. Am I anxious, yes! Am I afraid, No! Best of luck to all embarking on this journey!!

“Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.” – Theodore Roosevelt