



MAINTAINING PHYSICIAN RECRUITING EFFORTS IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19

A Resource of the Nation's Leading Physician Search and Consulting Firm

The coronavirus pandemic is putting an unprecedented strain on America's healthcare providers, hospitals, medical groups, and other healthcare facilities.

Amid the many challenges the virus creates is how to recruit the physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants and other professionals that health facilities continue to need now?

Among its many other negative effects, the virus is causing travel restrictions and challenges that are hindering candidate interviews. Whether the recruiting organization is restricting unnecessary outside visitors, the interviewing candidate's current employer is restricting their travel, or their family is simply not comfortable traveling at this time, travel challenges are likely to affect most ongoing search efforts.

There are, however, some options to address these challenges. The first option is to simply recruit under the pre-virus paradigm and only consider candidates who are willing and able to interview in person at the facility. Unfortunately, this will very likely significantly limit the number of candidates available for consideration. The second approach is to place recruiting efforts on hold until the virus has been contained to a point that travel restrictions and fears have been lifted. The down side to this option is that it may cause an interruption to recruitment momentum that can be difficult you reestablish.

The third option is to consider ways to get all the way through, or at least most of the way through, the recruiting process virtually.

The good news is that there are a number of healthcare systems and groups across the country that have been using video interviewing tools to hire physicians over the past few years, proving this model can work.

Many of Merritt Hawkins' clients choose to have a brief introductory phone or video call with candidates prior to inviting them out for in-person interviews. Traditionally, it is during the on-campus interview that both sides begin to learn whether there is a potential personal and professional fit between the candidate and hiring facility.

While there is no equivalent substitution for in-person meetings, it is certainly possible for both sides to assess the fit in detail in lieu of onsite meetings. Some candidates even prefer the efficiency of virtual

interviews, rather than taking several days off to travel. As virtual career fairs and the Amazon wave of “press a button to buy your favorite gadget” have become mainstream, the traditional interview process has evolved.

Thinking about the interview process as a series of boxes both sides must check in order to assess the fit, consider whether the following topics could be adequately addressed by video interviews with various members of your staff and the candidate:

1. Job description – clinical, teaching, research, administrative, procedural, call, and other responsibilities of the opening. It typically is not difficult to outline the requirements of the position and whether the candidate is willing and able to perform the job duties by phone or video interview.
2. Facilities – office space, equipment, patient rooms, and proximity of all facilities that the provider would use. Although most providers would prefer to see these facilities in person, it is possible to use marketing videos and pictures, campus maps, equipment lists, and even a Facetime tour of the facilities to answer most questions.
3. Personality fit – it is easiest to assess personality fit in person, perhaps at a lunch or dinner. However, video conference discussions can go beyond professional conversation and can be used for both parties to get to know each other on a personal level. Assuming the candidate is comfortable providing references, those can also be used to assess the candidate’s personality.
4. Community fit – Although it is very challenging to recruit a provider to a community their family has never visited, many of the candidates who may want to interview at your facility may already have ties to your area and in some cases they may already have a strong motivation to live in your area. If that is not the case, having a real estate agent provide information about the area, virtual home tours, and other information about the area can give them a strong level of comfort with the community.
5. Salary, incentives, benefits, and contract information. These details are often not discussed until after an onsite interview and frequently discussed by email or phone in a typical recruitment, so this part of the recruitment process may not be substantially different if the candidate does not visit in person.

It may not be possible for the recruiting party and its hiring leaders to make an official offer to a candidate without ever meeting them face to face and, in many cases, the candidate may not feel comfortable formally accepting an offer without a visit to the campus and community. However, if the recruiting team can cover the topics listed above, have a real estate representative educate the candidate about the community, walk them through a sample draft contract and offer terms, and check references before a visit ever takes place, recruiting momentum can be maintained and in some cases enhanced.

Obviously, these steps take time and if they transpire virtually while the nation waits for virus travel challenges to subside, it will keep candidates engaged and interested and keep search momentum moving forward. If these details are covered sufficiently in advance, the candidate may be comfortable focusing their efforts exclusively on your position and not pursuing other options. Since many other organizations may not be willing to cover so much of the recruiting process virtually, those that are gain a distinct advantage in recruiting motivated candidates who are unable to travel currently.

The COVID-19 travel challenges will certainly make recruiting more difficult until the virus is contained. However, those institutions that are willing to show flexibility in their process can continue to achieve recruiting success.

About Merritt Hawkins

Established in 1987, Merritt Hawkins is the leading physician search and consulting firm in the United States, specializing in the recruitment of physicians, physician leaders, and advanced practice health professionals. Merritt Hawkins is a company of AMN Healthcare (NYSE: AMN), the largest healthcare staffing organization in the U.S. and is an endorsed partner of the Nebraska, South Dakota, Iowa, Indiana and Michigan Hospital Associations.

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