Relocating for residency? Keep these things in mind

MAR 18, 2019

Timothy M. Smith
Senior News Writer

For many graduating medical students, the excitement of Match Day is quickly followed by the anticipation and uncertainty of relocating for residency. Three residents share tips for finding a new home that balances meeting the demands of clinical training with achieving family, financial and lifestyle goals.

The AMA provides additional resources to help residents manage their health, relationships and finances.

**Identify your must-haves.** These might include building a family, owning a home or pursuing avocations.

“My number one concern was safety because I had a newborn at the time and my mom was going to move in with us,” said Ellia Ciammaichella, DO, a fourth-year resident in physical medicine and rehabilitation at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, who did her internship year at College Medical Center, in Long Beach, California. “I also couldn’t deal with a long commute, so that narrowed my options quite a bit.

Scott H. Pasichow, MD, is a fourth-year emergency medicine resident at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University. He and his wife rescue pit bulls.

“Finding a rental property that allows that is very difficult, so we bought a house,” he said. “This went against the general advice I’d gotten, but our situation was unusual.”

**Talk with other residents in your program.** The people you met while interviewing may be able to answer your questions or point you to residents who can.

“If you’re a single person who likes nature, or if you have kids and you need child care, find residents in similar circumstances and talk to them about neighborhoods they considered and resources they used,” said Laura Halpin, MD, a third-year psychiatry resident at the University of California, Los
Angeles, Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Behavior.

“If you’re going to be renting, ask them how they found their apartments and also what kind of lease timeline the city works on so you know when to start looking,” she said. “In L.A., renters only need to give their landlords 30 days’ notice, so you can’t find many places further out than that.”

**Do the math.** Costs of living and moving expenses can vary widely.

“If you’re moving to a city like Los Angeles, it’s pretty much impossible to buy a home, so plan to rent,” Dr. Halpin said, noting that her program paid for some of her moving expenses. “But if you’re moving to a more affordable city and you could see yourself living there long term, then ownership might be worthwhile.”

Even if she had stayed in Long Beach beyond her intern year, Dr. Ciammaichella still would have rented because, given her needs, that’s all she could afford in that market. When her advanced residency sent her to Houston in her second year, however, housing there was much more affordable, and she was able to buy a home.

You should note, however, that being tied down to a mortgage can reduce your geographic mobility and limit your fellowship and practice location options.

**Be realistic.** Time will be at a premium, so factor in proximity to key locations and activities, as well as transportation options.

“First, you have to figure out how you’re going to get to and from work every day,” Dr. Pasichow said. “I was careful to buy within about a 20-minute drive of the hospital where I would be working, because there’s no commuter train.”

Dr. Halpin, anticipating L.A.’s notorious traffic, used Google Maps to calculate commutes at the times of day she knew she would be on the road.

“Keep in mind, you won’t just be working,” Dr. Ciammaichella said. “Let’s say you like to play basketball. Look into whether you’ll be close to a YMCA or something like that. The farther away things are, the less likely you’ll be to do them.”

**More resources for residents**

Drs. Ciammaichella, Halpin and Pasichow are all sectional delegates in the AMA Resident and Fellow Section (RFS), which represents the interests of resident and fellow physicians in the AMA House of Delegates.

For relocating residents, AMA member benefits offer favorable loan rates and transportation and
travel discounts that can ease the expenses associated with moving.