What to know before signing your 1st physician job contract

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Medical residents spend years learning the intricacies of their specialties and medical practice, but all that training does little to prepare them to navigate their first employment contracts.

Jobs in a hospital, group practice, industry, government, or locum tenens all have contracts that need to be reviewed and signed before new hires can see patients. The AMA has an educational module geared toward residents who are in search of their first job and unsure of the intricacies of their first contract.

“Physician Employment Contracts” is one of the AMA GME Competency Education Program offerings, which include nearly 30 courses that residents can access online through their residency institution’s subscription, on their own schedule.

Among the program’s experts are several who contributed to the AMA’s Health Systems Science textbook, which draws insights from faculty at medical schools that are part of the Association’s Accelerating Change in Medical Education consortium.

Modules cover five of the six topics—patient care, practice-based learning and improvement, interpersonal and communication skills, professionalism, and system-based practice—within the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education’s core competency requirements. The sixth requirement, medical knowledge, is one that is typically addressed during clinical education.

Complexities of physician contracts

An employment contract is a legal document that lays out binding terms and conditions of an employment relationship between an employee and an employer. Each contract is different from the next, so the goal of the module is to help residents solve the contract puzzle. The module also
reviews the various types of environments residents work in during their first year after residency training, which may require different provisions.

Provisions of an employment contract include:

- Basic terms of employment.
- Compensation package.
- Professional expenses.
- Billing.
- Employee benefit programs.
- Partnership options.
- Facilities support.
- Professional liability insurance.
- Termination clause.

Residents and fellows will learn what to look for in each contract provision as well as considerations if you decide to pursue a different opportunity down the road.

The complexities and technicalities of physician employment contracts are why residents can benefit from having an attorney review any contract before agreeing to its terms and conditions. There are lots of attorneys with different backgrounds, but a lawyer with physician contract experience will know what to look for in a contract—and potentially have a good understanding of the market where they want to work. The module provides tips around what to look for should you move forward with hiring an attorney and also empowers residents to ask questions along the way if something isn’t clear.

Visit the AMA GME Competency Education Program for more information on this and other offerings or to request a demo.