

CV writing 101: Tips for medical residents entering job market

JUN 11, 2020

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When residents or fellows apply for post-training positions, the packet of information they submit is likely to contain a cover letter and curriculum vitae (CV).

Whereas a resume highlights a person's experiences and skills in one to two pages, a CV is a comprehensive chronological story highlighting one's education, skills, experiences, academic pursuits and achievements.

Barbara G. Jericho, MD, is a professor of clinical anesthesiology at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Chicago. Having worked with residents and fellows and written about how to construct CVs, she has a few tips for trainees preparing their first-ever CV.

Learn the key elements of a CV.

CVs should be substantive but concise

The fact that a CV isn't restricted in length doesn't mean its author should go over-the-top in exposition. To be most effective, Dr. Jericho, believes your CV should be a comprehensive yet succinct document for the intended reader.

"It's very important to have a CV that is easily read," she said. "So, having a lot of words and paragraphs should be discouraged. For example, if someone did research at an institution, the CV should include a line or two discussing their research, not an entire paragraph. One can expand on skills and experience during an interview."

Learn what final-year residents value most in their job search.

Tailor your CV to the position

While a CV is going to highlight your academic background, certain aspects of that background are going to be more applicable to certain positions.

“What each employer looks for in a CV may vary,” Dr. Jericho said.

“The CV should highlight elements relevant to the sought-after position. If a position involves leadership or education skills, you likely honed those skills during your training, and you should highlight those skills in your CV. Also, positions may be seeking skills that relate to your subspecialty training.”

Get tips on employment interviews and negotiations.

Tell a story

Your CV is listed in chronological order. It is very much a history of what your career has been. Your cover letter and interview can tell the story of where it is going.

Coming out of training, your CV might not be expansive. But as your career evolves, Dr. Jericho said it's not uncommon for CVs to be 20 pages or longer.

“The story of a CV is the chronicle of a career,” Dr. Jericho said. “As a career evolves, additional areas of expertise and areas of interests evolve. This should be reflected in a CV to show the growth of an individual.”

Learn what to look for when evaluating a perspective employer.

Get feedback

If you're entering the job market, it makes sense to seek advice from people who have previously done so or who may even be able to make hires.

“The more eyes you have on your CV the more feedback you get,” Dr. Jericho said. “Mentors or colleagues may review your CV, yet a resident physician may also have their adviser or attending physicians review their CV. The more perspectives someone has on their CV the more it can be improved.”

Learn if you are up-to-speed with your physician job search.

Proofread

As impressive as your accomplishments may be, one typo can stand out more than any of them.

“You get one chance. If you have spelling errors or items are incomplete, then this may adversely influence the reader’s impression of you,” Dr. Jericho said.

For final-year residents entering the final stages of their job search, a series of the AMA’s “Making the Rounds” podcast offers insight on negotiating your first employment contract from AMA senior attorney Wes Cleveland. You can also listen to the full episode on Apple Podcasts, Google Play or Spotify.