5 networking tips for job-seeking residents, fellows

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For physicians approaching the conclusion of residency or fellowship the transition ahead differs from those that preceded it in that it tends to require a more proactive approach to securing employment than the other phases of training.

“One of the most challenging things about finding that first job is at least when applying for residency, applying for fellowship, there’s a joint application,” said Laura Halpin, MD, a child and adolescent psychiatrist with Kaiser Permanente, Southern California Permanente Medical Group in Los Angeles. “It’s the same timeline for anywhere you want to consider. There are really clear rules about how you communicate with people, when you communicate with people. It’s very clear who’s making the job decision. But then when it comes time to applying for job, that’s just not the case.”

Having successfully transitioned from training to practice in 2021, Dr. Halpin, an AMA member, offered these insights about how residents and fellows looking for a job can effectively network.

Make a plan to connect

Dr. Halpin reached out to a recruiter at Kaiser Permanente before they had a position open in her specialty. She said knowing where you want to be and the personnel who can help you land a position is a good starting point.

“In terms of the networking piece, sit down and think about it,” she said. “Ask yourself where are the places where that employer may be? Who are the key decision makers and how do I want to reach them?”

Learn about three key ownership models first-time job-seekers may consider.
Get out there

You are likely going to have some desired geography. In Dr. Halpin's case, she preferred to stay in the city in which she was a fellow, and ended up doing so. Whether you hope to stay local or make a move, going to events put on by specialty societies and state medical associations offer the chance to meet potential leads.

“For us, the Southern California Psychiatric Society holds a job fair-type event,” she said. “Look for local organizations, and figure out when they hold those events. Those things start happening around November. So, around October of your last year of training, be on the lookout.”

Dr. Halpin also said conferences within your specialty society could be a beneficial place to meet physicians who can connect you with potential job opportunities.

Get tips on creating a comprehensive CV for your job search.

Self-promote

If you are in the job market, there’s no reason to be bashful about it, Dr. Halpin said.

“During the last year of training, there are all these different capstone-type presentations,” she said. “When you’re giving those presentations to large rooms of people talk about your career goals and putting out it out there that you are in the last year of training and looking. I would say something like ‘I'm in my last year of training. I'm a psychiatrist. I'm interested in advocacy and working with patients in different communities.’”

Consider moonlighting

If you have the bandwidth—and for many trainees that’s a big “if”—moonlighting with an organization during your off-hours can be a good entre to a practice.

“That's another really good potential avenue to consider,” Dr. Halpin said. “Is there a way to moonlight at the organization and get your foot in the door? It lets them see your work.”

Find out the pros and cons of moonlighting during residency.
**Use your existing physician network**

If you worked with physicians during residency or fellowship and they have moved to a program in which you have interest, reaching out makes sense. Also look to past and current faculty members with whom you had a relationship to help you connect or to put in a good word on your behalf.

“I actually talked to recent grads who were working at other places that I was considering,” she said. “They were able to make email introductions and tell me about those organizations. I ended up realizing from those conversations that those places weren’t the best fit for me. So, that was also helpful information to have.”