Advice for young, job-seeking physicians on assessing practice culture

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Workplace culture can be a vital aspect of physician satisfaction. It only makes sense then that job seekers, particularly those weighing opportunities early in their careers, would want to know as much as possible about a practice environment to make an informed decision.


The toolkit includes insight on the ways a physician applicant can gauge culture. Having recently made the transition from resident to attending, AMA member Scott H. Pasichow, MD, MPH, also offered some thoughts in a separate interview on how he was able to find the right cultural fit in his post-residency job search. Here’s a look at some key tips.

Listen

Dr. Pasichow values camaraderie, and he said that, to him, the way staff interacts when they aren’t patient-facing can be an indicator of how much there is.

“When you do your tour of the clinical environment, how are the nurses referring to the doctors?” he said. “How are the doctors referring to the nurses? How did the doctors refer to each other? It's important, obviously, when you're in front of patients for communication to be more formal. And that's a value that I think a lot of doctors have, maintaining the ‘doctor last-name’ moniker.

“But there's real value,” he added, “when you're on a first-name basis with your colleagues, whether they're fellow physicians, or other members of the healthcare team.”
Learn with the AMA about four tech questions for young doctors should ask before joining a practice.

Ask about leave, PTO

Work-life balance is always a struggle for physicians. Understanding a practice or health care organization’s commitment to it is a key. One way to do that is learning not just about personal time off and parental-leave policies, but seeing how much time people actually use. This will help you to understand what the expectation is when you are planning a family, and can reveal their commitment to your work-life balance.

“There are jobs I applied for where they said: You can pick a few times to book a vacation, but wait until we send you the schedule to buy your plane tickets,” Dr. Pasichow said. “There are other jobs that said: Don't worry about it. If you want the time off, you'll get the time off. That flexibility translates to family leave and emergency coverage as well.”

Understand leadership roles

There are two key aspects to leadership within a practice or health care organization. How much interaction do physicians have with leaders and what roles are physicians expected to play in the leadership hierarchy?

In his interviews, Dr. Pasichow inquired about what roles emergency physicians had on hospital committees. He says it’s better if more physicians are involved.

“If one individual wears a lot of different hats for the department it can sometimes be challenging, because it’s really on that individual to maintain relationships,” he said. “Whereas when that responsibility is spread out amongst a number of different people, it shows that the leadership is invested in the department’s success.”

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Nothing is permanent

You might misread the cultural fit in a practice. Dr. Pasichow said if that’s the case, you shouldn’t be afraid to explore other opportunities.
“You may come in thinking it's a really good cultural fit for you,” he said. “After being there for a few months, you realize it doesn't work. Don't be afraid to make it change early in your career. It's best to be comfortable where you are so it can be somewhere you want to stay for 10 or 15 years or even your whole career.”

Learn about the AMA Young Physicians Section, which gives voice to—and advocates for—issues that affect physicians under 40 or within the first eight years of professional practice after their training as residents and fellows.