Looking for your first job after residency is generally going to be an equation that includes your personal and professional wants and the opportunities available.

How much weight is given to each side of the equation will be highly individualized. When considering the scope of your search, here are a few things to consider.

Think long-term

Brandi Ring, MD, is associate medical director for obstetrics and gynecology at The Center for Children and Women in Houston, a practice owned by the Texas Children’s Health Plan that offers a wide range of outpatient medical and dental care. She has mentored numerous younger physicians making the transition from residency to practice and advocates that physicians to look at the big picture while job searching.

“The things that I always recommend residents do is write down what they want their life to look like five, 10 or 20 years down the road,” said Dr. Ring, an AMA member. “What do they envision themselves doing professionally and what does that life look like for them.”

As you continue the journey to being a young physician, the AMA Transition to Practice series has guidance and resources on deciding where to practice, negotiating an employment contract, managing work-life balance and other essential tips about starting in practice.

Be patient

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In her initial post-residency job search, Dr. Ring had designs on returning to her home state of Colorado. That narrowed the focus to the point that she was “cold-dropping resumes” to leaders of academic medical centers.

Having a particular area in mind to practice in is one factor that can require a bit more time and patience in your search, Dr. Ring said.

“If you narrow your search, you may not be able to do it yourself without a significant time investment,” Dr. Ring said. “If you are going to limit your search to a single city for instance, you are probably going to need a recruiter. Those jobs might not actually be posted. You might need someone with insights into the specific opportunities.”

Michael Belkin, a divisional vice president for physician recruiting firm Merritt Hawkins, says that geography tends to be one of the more challenging limitations of a job search.

“The only time it’s challenging in our space for a candidate is when they are very specific about a location that is a desirable location,” Belkin said. “Is it more challenging to find a job in Chicago than Urbana? Absolutely.” Belkin added that over the past year about seven in 10 Merritt Hawkins job searches were in communities of 100,000 people or fewer. So, looking in those settings will generally yield more opportunity.

JAMA Career Center presents physician career opportunities, news and information relevant to the full spectrum of medical practice.

**It’s not a forever commitment**

Physicians commonly change job early in their careers.

Dr. Ring, who left her first post-residency physician job after six years said she wanted more opportunities to grow professionally. She has also seen situations in which candidates are attracted to jobs by financial incentives such as signing bonuses but the actual practice fit isn’t a good one. Belkin said that for both first-time entrants in the job market and young physicians looking for opportunities, the market is strong.

“If you decide tomorrow that you want to make a change, you are going to have plenty of opportunities,” Belkin said. “The more open-minded you are about where you would go, the more options you give yourself. But you can narrow it down and still have a handful of more than great opportunities at your disposal.”

Explore this advice for young, job-seeking physicians on assessing practice culture.


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