Recruit and Hire the Best Fit for Your Practice

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Hiring for your practice is a big responsibility as well as a commitment of time and resources. To find and place the right person for an opening in your practice, consider all of the tools and methods available to you. Use the Internet to advertise the open position, do background and credit checks, and communicate with candidates clearly and securely. Coordinate your assessment of candidates by the effective use of employment applications, peer interviewing, knowledge assessment tools, and written interviews. In-person interviewing is a timeless skill. This article provides insights, useful tools, and practical advice on recruiting for a perfect fit with the position and practice.

Key words: Hiring; position description; recruit; compensation; resumes; interview; employment application; peer interviewing; background check; references; orientation; employment; candidate; job professional; salary.

Even with unemployment at a high rate and it being seemingly an “employers’ market,” the process of recruiting, selecting, hiring, and retaining employees can be difficult and costly. Human resources development is more akin to diagnosing and designing treatment plans for interdisciplinary illnesses and comorbidities than replacing an arthritic knee or hip. Assessing and organizing the position(s) to be filled and finding the right individual(s) for the job(s) in your practice require planning, organization, objectivity, collaboration, persistence, and maintenance.

With expenses and regulations increasing while reimbursement is decreasing, it is important to take a critical look at each and every position in the practice and not fill a position just because it becomes vacant. Technology can also play a key role in redesigning and consolidating work flow to optimize human resources.

POSITION DESCRIPTIONS

Each position, not person, in the practice needs a formal position description (PD). If your practice does not have documented PDs already in place, create one for each position. If your practice does have PDs, update them as needed, especially if they have not been updated within the last year. A position vacancy is an ideal opportunity to review and update the PD.

Each PD should include:
- A position title;
- Summary;
- To whom the position reports;
- List of requirements and preferences;
- Qualifications and experience;
- Comprehensive list of responsibilities and tasks;
- Physical demands; and
- Standard work conditions.

The position title should be descriptive and convey dignity. “Clerk” does not denote competence, service orientation, or teamwork; however, “Associate” and

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position Title:</th>
<th>Term that most accurately describes the position and dignifies the role in the organization.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsible To:</td>
<td>The title(s) of the position(s) to whom the position reports.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Position Summary:</td>
<td>One or two sentences describing and summarizing the focus of the position. Assists in confirming that assigned tasks are in alignment with the position focus rather than comprising it.</td>
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**Educational, License, and Certification Requirements and Preferences:** Bulleted format; specific, verifiable degrees and certifications such as:
- High school diploma
- Bachelor’s degree
- Certified Medical Assistant
- Licensed, Registered Nurse
- Certified Coder

**Qualifications and Experience:** Bulleted format; specific qualities, skills, and experience such as:
- Two to four years in medical office, hospitality industry, or other service-based position
- Microsoft Word and Excel proficiency
- Pleasant speaking voice and demeanor
- Neat, professional appearance
- Experience with service recovery and customer service
- Strong written and oral communication skills

**Responsibilities and Tasks Include but Are Not Limited To:** Bulleted format; typically begin with a verb. May range from 10 to 25 in number. Each describes task/responsibility succinctly but with sufficient detail. Examples for various positions include:
- Greets patients according to script/protocol as they arrive for appointments
- Verifies demographic and insurance information for all patients according to protocol, with 100% accuracy
- Establishes and works within an annual budget
- Attends meetings as requested by leadership
- Attends continuing education sessions as requested by leadership
- Performs additional duties as requested by _____________________ (title of supervisor and other leader[s])

The three statements directly above (in bold) should appear on all PDs to provide managerial flexibility.

**Typical Physical Demands:** To comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines, each PD must state the physical requirements. Have your attorney approve the ADA statement before you finalize any PDs. An example might be: Position requires full range of body motion including handling and lifting patients, manual and finger dexterity, and eye-hand coordination. Position involves standing and walking.

OR

Employee will occasionally be asked to lift and carry items weighing up to 40 pounds. Normal visual acuity and hearing are required. Employee will work under stressful conditions and work irregular hours. Employee will be exposed to bodily fluids on a regular basis.

**Standard Working Conditions:** Provides employees and candidates with a realistic description of the working conditions specific to the position. Examples include:
- Normal office environment.
- Occasional evening or weekend work.

OR

Frequent exposure to communicable diseases, toxic substances, ionizing radiation, medicinal preparations, and other conditions common to a clinical environment.

*Figure 1. Guide to creating a formal position description.*

“Representative” do. Regardless of the position, it is important that the person doing it feels a sense of contribution and worth. Figure 1 is a guide to developing or enhancing PDs.
COMPENSATION PACKAGE

Once the PD is complete, determining the pay range should follow naturally. Each position within the practice should have a pay “range” assigned to it. The pay range for positions should be determined based on the licensure or certification required for the position, experience necessary to do the job, essential skills and qualifications for the position, and what employers in your market are paying for comparable positions.

Also included in the compensation package are any benefits and perks that the practice offers the employees. For some candidates, health insurance coverage is the sole or predominant reason for a job search.

POSTING THE POSITION

Understanding all of the components of the compensation package being offered is essential to writing a position posting that will be attractive to the most qualified candidates. Make no mistake, the position posting is an advertisement that exists among a host of competing positions and employers. Changing jobs or reentering the job market represents a big change for most people. They search the want ads looking for the position and organization they can get excited about.

What about your practice is different? What about your practice is so great that it will convince top-notch candidates to apply?

And while you read this article on a printed page, position postings in an actual newspaper is probably a waste of time and money. Think about it: every one of your PDs probably makes some reference to familiarity with computer usage and the Internet. Your next top-notch employee is not going to find you via the newspaper; he or she is going to find you online. Therefore, Monster.com, CareerBuilder.com, the online version of your local newspaper, Craigslist.org, Healthcareers.com—all of these are worth exploring for your posting.

Consider the “headline” of your ad, specifically content that appears “above the fold” or does not require scrolling down the screen to be viewed.

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Look at the features of the ad shown in Figure 2. The first three lines cover what just about everyone is looking for in a new job. Each of the positions posted offers details about the requirements and an enticing description of what it would be like to work at this practice. The final paragraph has a number of features that are appealing, including “competitive compensation”; employee benefits

Our practice offers you professional development, collaborative, fair-minded managers & OUTSTANDING BENEFITS. We provide 1st class patient care and service. Multiple openings, read on...

Reimbursement Specialist: If you have at least 1 yr exp in a group practice billing department, and are driven to obtain accurate, fair reimbursement on behalf of patients, we’d like to meet you. The ideal candidate is: familiar with CPT and ICD-9 coding, comfortable with Internet applications, effective in communication, analytical, and has an affinity for detail. Practice management software experience a must. ________________ [practice software name] preferred. If you have proven skills and are interested in working with a highly collaborative and supportive team and manager, respond now.

Patient Services Associate: If you have at least 6 mos exp in a specialty group practice and are a people person with attention to detail, we’d like to meet you. The ideal candidate is a service-oriented multi-tasker who is comfortable on the computer, has excellent communication skills and thrives on helping others. If this sounds fulfilling and you are interested in working with a collaborative, supportive team and manager, respond now.

We offer competitive compensation. Employee benefits are the same as physicians’ including: 100% premium paid on comprehensive health and dental, and 401K/profit sharing. Mon-Fri scheduling avail. Please send resume (include salary history, and position of interest) & cover letter stating position to: Fax: 555.555.555 – Email: hr@greatpractice.com. We do comprehensive background and credit checks. Visit us at www.greatpractice.com for detailed information on each position. EOE

Figure 2. Sample of employment want ad.
RESUMES

To revisit the medical analogy offered in the introduction, with resumes and cover letters it is a more efficient approach to “rule out” candidates. Even some of the smaller details in a resume say a great deal about the individual it represents. Any one of following resume or cover letter missteps might result in a candidate rule out; two or more definitely do:

- An e-mail address that is clearly through the candidate’s current employer;
- A phone number that is at the current employer;
- A personal e-mail address that would be rated PG-13 or R by the Motion Picture Association of America;
- Typographical errors; and
- Misspellings.

If the candidate does not include a salary history or range with the resume submission when it is specifically requested in the posting, that fact may tell you that he or she was unable to read and/or follow directions; is not experienced in the current market and does not know what to list as a range; or simply disregarded the request. While a candidate’s failure to list a salary range/need in response to an ad that specifically requested it may not be a rule out per se, it is an indication for caution and should be addressed early on in the telephone interview.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Phone interviews are not simply conversations or calls to set up in-person interviews. They are interviews done by telephone. They should be scheduled and conducted at a time that is mutually convenient. The interviewer should introduce him- or herself and by name and position with the practice. There should be a couple of open-ended questions about experience, what is being sought after in the position change, and perhaps what attracted the candidate to the position. By the conclusion of the telephone interview, the interviewer should know what the candidate’s salary needs are. In-person interviews are a big commitment of time and effort, and therefore should not be done if the candidate’s compensation needs are not well within the range for the position.

APPLICATION

Upon the candidate’s arrival for the in-person interview, he or she must complete and sign an employment application. Many physicians and managers mistakenly think that as long as someone submits a resume, a completed application is not necessary. There are several reasons to have the candidate complete the application:

- To confirm that the candidate knows his or her own employment history well enough to restate it on the application (Often people get their friends and family to do their resumes for them, the process of accurately completing the application demonstrates that the candidate is capable and not overly reliant on others);
- To secure a handwriting sample, not for analysis but for neatness and readability; and
- To obtain a signature attesting to the accuracy and truth of everything listed on the application (see Figure 3).

INTERVIEWING

Although subjective and energy intensive, hiring without multiple in-person interviews is out of the question. The goal of the interview is to get to know the candidate. The only way to get to know a candidate and gain a notion as to whether he or she is a good fit for the position and the practice is to engage the candidate in a conversation in which he or she does most of the talking. To do this, ask open-ended questions. Open-ended questions result in an answer of two or more sentences, and they encourage the responder to speak at length.

Ironically, some of the best open-ended interviewing “questions” are not actually questions, they are...
statements requesting descriptions. They begin with, “Describe . . .,” “Tell me about . . .,” and “How . . .”. Questions that begin with “Are,” “Is,” and “Will” typically represent closed-ended questions, which do not facilitate the goal of getting the applicant to talk.

You will learn nothing about the candidate and his or her ability to do the job or fit in with the practice while your mouth is open.

Often open-ended questions will require the candidate to pause and think a minute before answering; do not give in to the temptation to fill the silence by talking. You will learn nothing about the candidate and his or her ability to do the job or fit in with the practice while your mouth is open. Be comfortable with the silence. One way or another, it will be worth the wait—you will learn something about the individual rather than hearing the sound of your own voice. Be sure to consider communication and interpersonal skills such as eye contact, poise, professional appearance, gestures, body language, etc.

Certain questions and topics of discussion are illegal. DO NOT ask applicants anything regarding marital status or plans, parental status or plans, race, ancestry, age, religion, political affiliation, sexual orientation, veteran’s status, or disability.

Prepare for the interview in advance of the first candidate arriving for the first interview. Commit a series of open-ended questions to paper so that you can ask each candidate the same questions, and take notes during each interview to compare later.

The inability or unwillingness to stop texting long enough for a job interview (from entering the building to exiting) is indicative of after-hire behavior.

Consider and optimize the opportunities for assessment even before you meet the candidate. Let the receptionist know the candidate is coming; the receptionist is in a position to make discreet and helpful observations. What does the candidate do with his or her cell phone before, during, and immediately after the interview? The inability or unwillingness to stop texting long enough for a job interview (from entering the building to exiting) is indicative of after-hire behavior.

Knowledge Assessment

An alphabetization quiz for candidates for medical records positions and a basic knowledge assessment of billing and collections can be really helpful in determining if the experience listed on the resume and in discussed in conversation is comparable to what the open position demands. Billing and collections assessments should include general questions as well as some that pertain to reading a sample explanation of benefits.

Written Interview

For management or director level positions in larger practices, a written interview the candidates do at home will indicate their thoughtfulness, intelligence, and ideas on specific issues and challenges; writing skills; time and effort commitment to getting the job; and ability to meet a deadline.

Subsequent and Peer Interviews

After the first round of interviews is over, you will likely have narrowed the candidate list down to two or three final candidates. Do NOT skip the subsequent interview(s). Meeting with a candidate following the initial interview will allow for observations beyond first impressions. This interview is a little more relaxed—the goal is to get to know the candidate a little better, and allow him or her to check out the practice in more detail.

The second interview should include a tour of the practice and an introduction to key employees. Ask several key staffers to conduct half-hour interviews with each candidate. Since these individuals will work with the candidates on a daily basis, they should have an opportunity to speak with them. Often candidates will reveal more about themselves when talking with individuals who will serve as peers rather than leaders. Be sure the staff understand how to conduct meetings with candidates. Ask the staff members to prepare a short list of questions in advance.

Listen to staff! They may detect gaps in competency and other concerns you overlooked. Encourage staff to add value to the recruitment process by taking their comments seriously.

If the subsequent interviews go well and you are considering making an offer, confirm the candidate’s compensation range and benefits needs. Ask the candidate about his or her timeline and likely start date. How an individual handles the departure from a current position and the notice he or she provides are indications of the professionalism the individual will show your organization after hire.

BACKGROUND AND CREDIT CHECKS

Estimates indicate that up to 45% of resumes include falsifications about work history with 40% having lied about education and 25% falsifying credentials. Those estimates combined with the information that is now available via the Internet make background and credit

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checks essential. There are numerous online services that run a variety of background checks for reasonable prices. Background checks can include criminal history, social security trace, employment verification, residential history, education verification, licensure and certification confirmation, and more.

Credit checks are commonly done for a number of positions in a practice, especially those positions that have access to funds posting, cash handling, and accounts payable.

There are a number of services available for background checks; most can deliver within 2 to 72 hours and can be accessed on the Web (examples are www.trustedemployees.com, www.reality-check.com, and www.accuscreen.com).

Consider doing a basic Google search of each candidate as well. Many people have Internet presences (Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, or their own personal blogs and Web sites) that will reveal quite a bit about them as individuals.

REFERENCES

Require references from candidates who reach the final stages of selection, and then CALL THEM. The number of employers who ask for references and then do not actually make contact before making an offer is astounding. To use our medical analogy again, this is like ordering an MRI and then not reading the report or looking at the image. Some practices have policies that limit the information they will share about a candidate (dates of employment, title, and last pay rate). Others are willing to say more about the individual. Just as with the interview, design some open-ended questions for the reference checks. Above all, be sure to get the answer to the question, “Is __________ eligible for rehire?” or “If the right position and circumstances arose, would __________ be welcomed back as an employee at your organization?”

SELECTION AND OFFER

An additional advantage to involving two or more people in the recruitment process is consensus on the ranking of final candidates. Talking with others about the different candidates will help determine who is the best fit. During the discussion, rank all of the final candidates, in case your number one choice does not accept the offer.

While you may make the offer over the phone and finalize the start date, pay rate, and other details, commit the offer and details to a letter or e-mail and request confirmation of acceptance.

After the number one candidate has accepted the offer, notify the subsequently ranked candidates that the position has been filled.

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The hiring process described in this article is involved and seemingly long. Keep the communication with the top candidates open and frequent. If they are “go-getters” and highly qualified candidates, they will most likely have a choice of offers and secure a position quickly.

ORIENTATION AND ONBOARDING

Provide a copy of the employee policy manual to the new employee so that he or she can read it, learn about the practice, and attest by signature to having received and read it. Similarly, share a copy of the operational policies and procedures that pertain to the position and related processes. Create a schedule for the new employee’s first two to four weeks of employment. Include specifics as to who the employee will train with and when. Schedule the new employee to have lunch with other employees and to see how other functions are done in the practice. Be sure to schedule time and attention for thorough training. Many practice management software systems offer Web-based training. Establish and document the expectations for the first 30, 60, and 90 days, and meet with the employee at those increments to learn how he or she is adapting and to provide feedback. Finally, check in periodically with co-workers and supervisors to gain a perspective on how the new recruit seems to be doing.