

Practice Evaluation Checklist and Action Plan

First and Foremost: Lifestyle

- Will you and your family be happy living in the community for several years?
- Is affordable, quality housing available in the community?
- Are schools, shopping, and recreational, cultural and religious facilities readily available and accessible?
- Can you, your family and friends visit each other easily?
- Are there employment opportunities for your significant other and family?

When Evaluating A Salaried Position

- Have you addressed what you are to give, what you are to receive, and all of the “what ifs” with your lawyer and financial advisor?

When Joining a Group and/or Assuming a Practice

- Does the practice have a specialty interest or special needs population?
- Does the practice follow current guidelines and evidence-based medicine?
- What are the policies regarding antibiotic, narcotic and anxiolytic medications?
- Are patients charged for non-insured services? If so, for what services?
- What are the office policies for phone-call prescription renewals and missed appointments?
- How are requests for sick-leave notes handled?
- Does the practice offer obstetrics or minor surgical procedures?
- What are the regular office hours? Is there flexibility for your schedule?
- What are the on-call obligations for the hospital, nursing home or emergency department?
- Do the doctors share the on-call obligations equally?
- What are the arrangements with other physicians for after-hours, weekend and holiday coverage?
- Does the practice have a comprehensive list of specialists for referrals?
- Are there teaching opportunities or obligations?
- Is the practice in an area where hospital restructuring has happened or is pending?

Appointment Scheduling

- What is the average number of patients seen per day?
- How much time is allocated for the average patient visit?
- Are time slots reserved for check-ups and counselling?
- How many time slots are allocated for same-day call-ins? How are these patients accommodated in the schedule?

- How many periodic health examinations are scheduled each day? How much time is allocated for these appointments? When during the day are they scheduled?
- When are procedures done? How much time is allocated for procedures?
- Does the practice offer variety (e.g., pediatrics, geriatrics, adolescents, women's health)?
- Is the reason for the patient visit recorded on the appointment schedule?
- Does the practice have an extensive list of contacts (e.g., call group members, consultants, labs, diagnostic services and pharmacies)?
- Can you customize your appointment schedule?

Medical Records

- Are the medical records comprehensive, well organized and legible?
- Do the physicians dictate or write progress notes?
- Are progress notes done in a SOAP format (symptoms, observations, assessment and plan)?
- Do the physicians keep up-to-date cumulative patient profiles and such records as cumulative medication sheets, diabetic, INR and lipid flow sheets?
- Are allergies and immunization records clearly marked?
- Do the records indicate compliance with evidence-based practice guidelines for preventative care and screening?
- Do the records indicate the office's prescribing habits for controlled drugs, anxiolytics and antibiotics?
- Do the records raise any concerns regarding medical competence?
- Will the group members welcome standardization of medical records?
- Does the practice have, or intend to have, an electronic medical records and chartless office?

The Medical Office

- Do the physicians own, lease or sublet office space?
- Which office functions are computerized? Which are still done manually?
- What communications equipment does the office use?
- Is the office accessible, modern, comfortable, clean and pleasant for patients, staff and physicians?
- Are the exam rooms and common areas well designed for function and comfort?
- Is the office and medical equipment up to date?
- Will your personal needs for equipment and office space be met?
- What are the present and proposed staffing arrangements?
- Will you have shared or dedicated staff?
- What responsibility will you have for hiring and evaluating staff?

Finances and Billing

- Does the group have an association or partnership agreement?
- Are shared and individual expenses clearly delineated in the agreement?
- Will expenses be shared equally, or will they be proportionate to each physician's utilization?
- Have you reviewed the agreement in detail with your lawyer and accountant?
- Are you happy with the financial terms of the partnership or associateship?
- Are any health, dental or other benefits available through the practice?
- How are the physicians remunerated? Fee-for-service? Alternative payment plan? Blended format? Salary?
- Who submits and reconciles the billings?
- Are there clear policies for the billing and collection of fees for non-insured and third-party services?
- Is there a clear policy regarding patients who have overdue accounts?
- Does the practice post its office policies and distribute patient information sheets to clearly inform patients that they will be billed directly services?

Accounting

- Has your accountant reviewed the bookkeeping and accounting practice in detail?
- Are expense and income records readily available for your review and approval?

Insurance and Legal Issues

- Do all group members have adequate professional and personal liability insurance, life insurance, office insurance, disability insurance and practice overhead insurance to cover any losses or obligations for the term of the group practice agreement?
- Has your lawyer reviewed and approved the office lease?
- Have your lawyer and accountant reviewed and verified that your best interests are covered in the association or partnership agreement?

Bottom Line

- Do your future associates have a vested interest in your success?

Action Plan during Residency

- Take advantage of the many clinical as well as professional learning opportunities you will be exposed to during the rest of your residency. Gather as much information as you can.
- Talk with as many physicians as you can to learn what they have done right and, more important, what they have done wrong or wish they had done better.
- Ask questions until you get all of the answers you need.
- Research as many office policy and procedure manuals as possible.
 - Copy those you like and note the policies, procedures and issues that you don't want to copy or adopt when you set up practice.
- Stay up to date with the medical/political issues of the day—they may affect the decisions you make about your future medical practice.