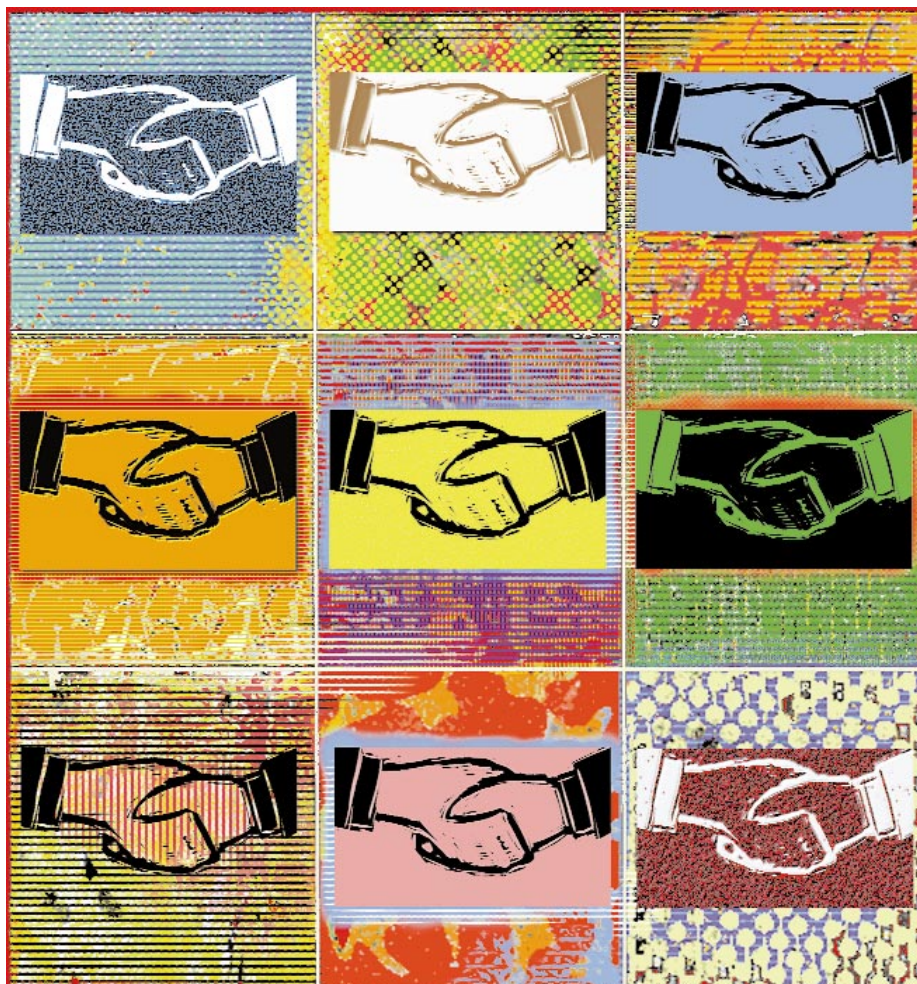


# AGING

An honest self-assessment and research on  
your prospective employer can help you land the job that's right for you.

A step-by-step guide to making the right impression.



# THE INTERVIEW

By Cynthia Myers

**N**ext to finding the right spouse, finding the right job is probably one of the most important searches anyone can make. End up in the wrong place and you'll be miserable. Land a plum position and you're on your way. First, of course, you have to get through the job interview, that nerve-wracking process of meeting face-to-face with your possible future supervisors and peers, trying to determine in the course of a few hours if you are 'right' for each other.

"Interviews make you insecure," notes Leah Cooper, MD, of La Junta, Colorado. "They make you feel like 'Here I am once again trying to make people think I'm good enough.' You wonder 'Do I fit the mental image of who they want for the job?'"

You could think of it as the workplace version of the blind date. Make a bad showing and you may have lost your dream job. Put your best foot forward and you could be on your way to a long and satisfying relationship.

Fortunately, unlike the average blind date, you don't have to walk into the job interview clueless as to what to expect and what is expected of you. In fact, preparation is the key to a successful interview.

## Gearing up for the interview

"I think one mistake physicians make is that they haven't really thought things through," says Mike Strieker, the president of Healthcare Recruiters in Phoenix, Arizona. "They haven't really sat down and asked themselves, 'What do I want in my career?' They need to ask themselves where they want to go. They need to think about not only what type of organization do I want to be a part of, but where will that lead me in the next five to 10 years?"

Some questions to ask yourself before the interview:

### **What type of position do I want?**

*Are you looking for a hospital-based position, an academic post, large-group practice, small-group practice, or solo practice?*

### **Where do I want to be geographically?**

*Do you want to live close to relatives?  
Close to the mountains or the beach?  
In a rural area or metropolitan area?*

### **What amenities do I want nearby?**

*Are good schools important? Shopping?  
Recreational opportunities?*

### **What procedures do I want to do?**

*What do I want to avoid?  
Am I willing to take call, and how often?*

### **Where do I want to be in my career in five years or 10 years?**

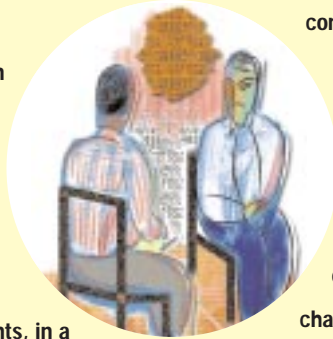
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## The Interviewer's "Least-Wanted" List

*Don't end up as one of these career-ending characters*

### 1. The candidate without a clue.

This character doesn't know what he wants in a career. He figures he'll interview with anyone who'll have him and take the best offer he can get. Unfortunately, this approach makes him seem aimless and unfocused to potential employers. If he does find a position, it may be one no one else wants, in a troubled organization. If he'd checked things out beforehand, he could avoid those nightmare jobs.



### 2. Johnny Come Lately.

If this candidate owns a watch, he doesn't use it. He arrives late for every appointment, keeping people waiting and pushing the schedule back further and further. By the end of the day, people are losing patience, and thinking this candidate is very likely to lose patients as well.

### 3. Doctor Dress Down.

Hawaiian shirts and khakis are his favorite style of dress. Why not let his future employer see the 'real' him? The problem is, dressing like a slacker makes people assume you're the real thing. If he'd worn a suit to his interview, the people he talked to might have seen past his clothes to the competent physician he really is.

### 4. Ms. Hard to Get.

Whether she's too shy to ask questions, or too ignorant to know what to ask, this candidate comes across as aloof and uncaring in her interview. If she can't talk to other physicians, how will she communicate with patients? She doesn't

come across as a team player or someone who is particularly enthusiastic about her work or her own merits. She's passed over for the candidate who is eager to interact with her interviewers.

### 5. The 'M' in M.D. stands for Money.

This candidate thinks she'll save time by cutting to the chase. Forget about all that touchy-feely getting-to-know-you stuff and let's talk money. Salary, benefits, retirement. That's what really makes the difference between one position and the next, isn't it? This candidate makes others uncomfortable with her focus on money, money, money. Being a physician requires a commitment to the art and science of medicine. Interviewers want to feel you believe in more than just filling up your bank account.

### 6. The candidate was great, but his wife (or her husband) ...

A wife who gossips, a husband who makes a pass at your future colleague, a spouse who dresses like a slob or has poor table manners, or worst of all, a partner who seems to have absolutely no interest in your job or your future position, can shoot down an otherwise promising position. The two of you are a team on and off the job, so make sure you act like it.

### 7. The candidate who's afraid to commit.

This physician likes to keep his options open. He's not sure if he should take the first offer. What if something better comes along? So he strings along potential employers, stalling for time and likely as not, ending up empty handed. ■

"[Doctors] also need to look at what else is important to them," Strieker adds. "What about their family? Do they have a spouse who will need to find another job? Do they have children? Will they need to consider schools? Those things are important."

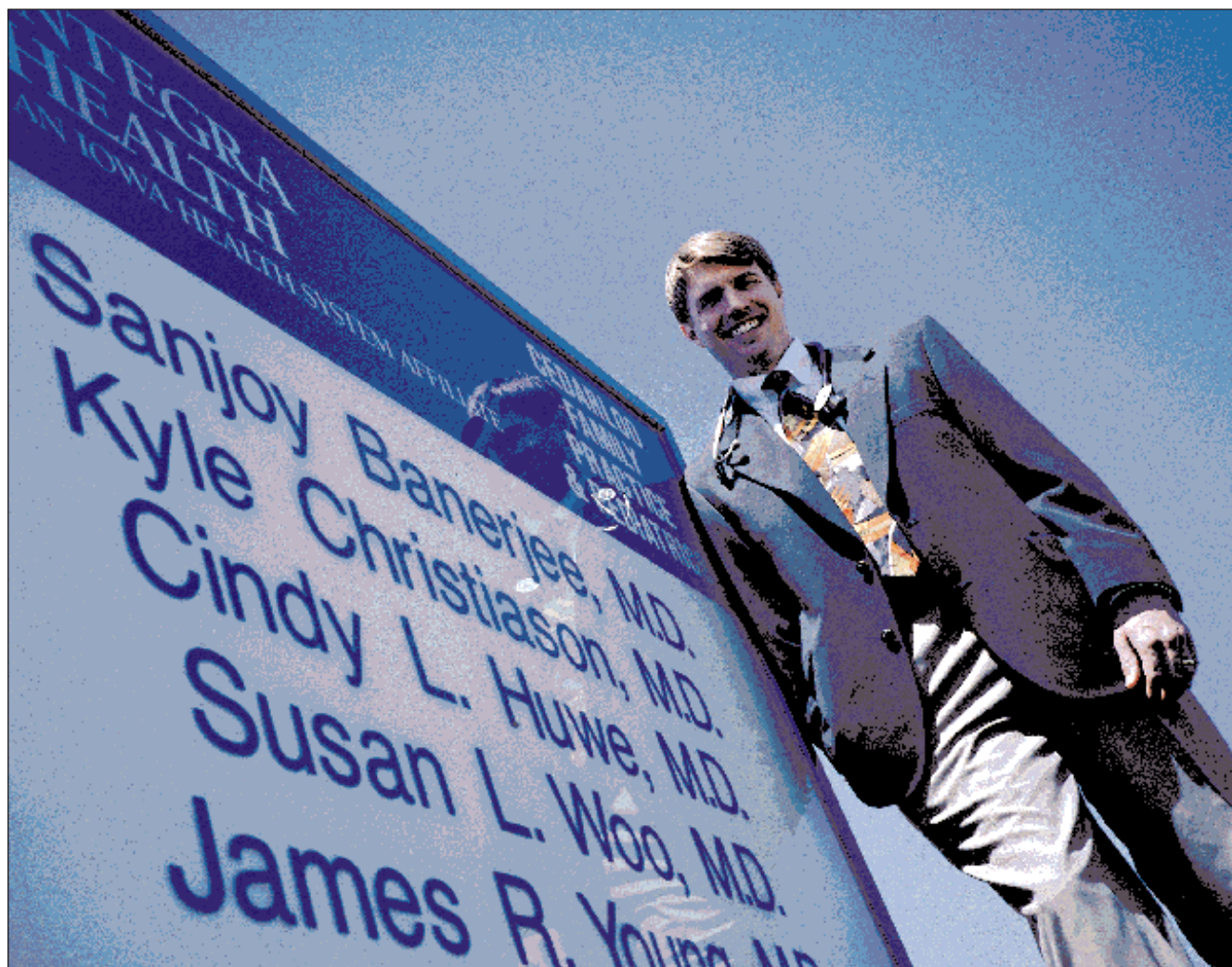
Kyle Christiason MD, who accepted his first position out of residency in July of 1999 with Integra Health in Cedar Falls, Iowa, advises physicians to compile lists of questions to ask about a potential job. "I think doing a lot of research is important," Christiason says. "Make your questions per-

inent to your own situation. It's important going into the experience to prioritize your goals. What is most important to you—location, size of group, the overall environment for your specialty in that region?"

Cooper agrees. Part of a small, rural group practice, she recently inter-

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viewed for a teaching position in a large city. She spent a lot of time preparing for her interviews. "The main thing I did was talk to people who had made similar choices," she says. "I talked to people in academia, and doctors who had made the switch either from practice to academia, or out of academia, back to practice. I spent some time getting together questions I wanted answered."

Once you've established what you're looking for in a job, the next step is to research the organization with whom you'll be interviewing. "First of all, know what you're looking for," Strieker advises. "Second, know the organization, whether that

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be a company, a hospital, a partnership or a medical clinic. Know what their plans are. Where do they want to be five or 10 years out? Do your homework. Go on the Internet and find the company's or hospital's Web page to find out more. Call your stockbroker and find out how the stock is doing. If you call investor relations, they'll usually send you an investor's package. It will contain a lot

of information about where that company is going. What is the company's mission statement? That can be very important in determining if that company has the same goals and philosophy as you. Also, call people who work there or have worked there in the past and talk to them."

In the course of your research, if you discover things that don't fit with your goals, don't be afraid to ask

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more questions or even cancel the interview. "I've been on the other end a lot lately," Cooper says. "We've been trying to fill several positions here and we've been interviewing people. My advice, coming from both sides of the table, is to really decide what you want as opposed to the shotgun approach of just interviewing at a bunch of different places. If you're really not interested in a particular area or position, it's a lot of wasted energy and time on both sides and can generate some bad feelings."

### The big day

By the time the day of your interview arrives, you should have a good picture of the type of organization with whom you'll be interviewing, a good idea of what you're looking for in a new job, and a list of questions you'd like answered to help you make your decision. You're probably excited, maybe more than a little nervous, and you want to make the best impression possible.

Start off right by arriving on time for your appointments. "Physicians are notorious for not being on time," says Katie Warren, the director of physician development at Allen Memorial Hospital in Waterloo, Iowa. "But I think when someone is taking time out of their schedule to meet with you, it's very important for you to respect that."

In fact, it's a good idea to arrive a few minutes, or even half an hour early. Spend the time before the interview collecting your thoughts and getting a feel for the layout of the hospital or clinic. Take a walk around the neighborhood, have a cup of coffee, or simply sit in the lobby, and observe the people working there.

First impressions really do count, so dress comfortably, but well. "I always recommend business attire," Warren says. "To me, the better you're dressed,

the more prepared you'll seem." Go easy on the perfume or cologne and keep jewelry and accessories understated. Err on the side of conservative.

While you don't want to be weighted down with things to carry from place to place, you should bring a few important papers with you. Warren suggests having five copies of your CV on hand. "The person arranging the interview should have handed these out prior to the interview," she says. "But sometimes you'll run into people who haven't seen it and they'll want to review it, so it's good to have it available. And definitely make sure your CV is spell-checked."

She also recommends having a list of at least four references on hand. "And make sure your references are accessible," she says. "Sometimes it can take weeks or months to get references back and that will delay the interview process."

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Depending on the type of position for which you're interviewing, your interview may take one of several formats, though plan on a full day of activities. Warren describes her organization's typical interview process as a mix of informal and formal meetings, with community and hospital tours interspersed with interviews with key people in the organization. She also tries to arrange time with as many of the interviewee's potential colleagues as possible. "I like to include a lot of different physicians from the organization, so that [the interviewee] can meet the vari-

ous players he or she will be working with," Warren says. "If you're an emergency room physician, you're going to be working with a lot of different physicians from the different departments. If you're a family practice physician, you're going to want to meet the OB physicians and the ER physicians who will also see your patients." The day will often conclude with a dinner at a local restaurant or country club.

Sometimes, you'll be escorted from place to place; other times, you'll be on your own. "They gave me a schedule and a map," Cooper says of her interviews for a teaching position. "I talked to a dozen different people at four different locations. I'd meet with one person, then drive across town to meet with someone else."

This hectic pace allows a lot of people in the organization to meet you, but all the personalities and information coming at you in such a short time can be overwhelming. "The hardest thing about interviews is getting a truly accurate picture of what the daily work environment is like," Christiason says. "One can see obvious personality matches and mismatches, but the typical day, as far as how the clinic is run and the efficiency of the whole organization, is hard to pick up in an interview."

Don't underestimate the importance of those personality matches and mismatches, though. Determining compatibility is probably the number one reason for face-to-face interviews. "[In the interview process] I'm looking for a physician's patient care philosophy and trying to match that up with those individuals that he or she is interviewing with," says Jim McMillin, the director of physician services at Sherman Health



McMILLIN

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Systems in Elgin, Illinois. In the last seven years, McMillin has placed about 120 physicians. “We do a pretty thorough reference check beforehand, so we’re confident they’re medically qualified,” he says. “But is there a match from the personality standpoint? Does their patient care philosophy match up with those physicians they’re interviewing with?”

To help you keep track of people you meet and your impressions of them, Warren suggests carrying a copy of your itinerary with you throughout the day and making notes on it after each meeting. “You can review the notes later,” she says. “This can help you keep track of the different players and it may spark some questions.”

During the interview, be prepared to ask lots of questions. In fact, if you don’t, the interviewer could take it as a sign of disinterest. “The biggest mistake I’ve seen are applicants not interacting in the process, not asking questions about the practice, not telling them what you’re looking for in a practice,” Warren says.

Strieker advises asking detailed questions. “Ask what your role will be,” he says. “Ask where they see you in the next year or in the next five years with this company or practice.”

Be up front about your needs and your situation. “If you’re looking at a couple of different places, it’s always good to be honest about that,” Warren says. “Not to the point that you’re pitting them against one another, but I have heard a million times ‘if only I’d known they had an offer from so-and-so, maybe we could have negotiated this and such.’”

And don’t be afraid to blow your own horn a little. Employers like to see enthusiasm for a position. “This is a very good market for physicians right

now,” McMillin says. “An error I believe physicians make is that they fail at times to sell themselves during the interview process. They assume the job is automatically theirs before they come in for the interview.”

Don’t, however, bring up the subject of money too early. “The number one error I see is within the first fifteen minutes of the interview, they want to talk about compensation,” McMillin says.

Warren agrees that this is a common mistake. “If you have issues, such as a heavy loan debt to cover or other concerns, discuss them with your recruiter or in-house contact first. They can help present the subject in a less-threatening way,” she says. “I don’t think you should focus on salary and money as your main concern. Most physicians feel that your main concern should be your patients, your practice, your partners, and your staff.”

If you’re married, your spouse should accompany you to the interview. You may be the person applying for the job, but your spouse is an important player in the hiring process. “You would be surprised at how much of a commitment level you can gauge from the spouse’s reaction and their involvement,” Warren says. “I think the spouse needs to be as open and friendly as the person who’s interviewing. Especially when you have a dinner and the spouses accompany the physician, the spouse’s personality can be a factor. If one spouse doesn’t like another, that shouldn’t be an issue, but it can be.”

Jim McMillin recalls two different occasions where the spouse actually cost a promising candidate a job. “These two physicians had great interviews and everything was going well,” he says. “Dinner that evening was scheduled at a local country club, which had a dress code. The physicians arrived

dressed appropriately, but in both cases the spouses, both males, refused to abide by the dress code. The spouses cost those physicians the jobs. They left a bad impression. It was almost as if the spouse had a chip on his shoulder.”

Another reason to encourage your spouse’s participation is to have someone in your corner with whom you can discuss the day’s events and your impressions of the people and the position in general.

### After the interview

Once the interview is over, you’ll likely be exhausted, excited, and maybe a little anxious. How do you know if it went well? “For me, it’s a visceral feeling of good or bad,” Christiason says. “It’s not necessarily a matter of punching out a list of pros and cons and going with the longest list. Sometimes it’s important to rely on your instincts.”

Take time to review your notes. If you’re married, discuss the experience with your spouse and get his or her impression. Make note of any questions that come to mind and follow up on them. “I think it’s important to identify who is your one contact at the organization,” Christiason says. “It’s difficult in some places to know who to contact with questions. Here, I knew who that person was and I felt comfortable calling them. I knew I could get an answer right away. A couple other places I interviewed, I wasn’t sure who to talk to. There was no one clear-cut person who, even if they didn’t have the answer I needed, could find it for me.”

Be sure to write thank-you letters to those with whom you interviewed. Take this opportunity to reiterate your interest in the position and anything that particularly appealed to you about the job.

If the organization contacts you with

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an offer, be prepared to make a decision. “A lot of physicians aren’t prepared to make a quick decision,” McMillin says. “When we’re excited to hire someone, there’s usually a two or three-week window when they’re going to have to make a decision. A lot of times, we’re not willing to wait two months for an answer.”

“If you wait too long, it doesn’t seem you’re very interested,” Warren says. “It also raises questions as to whether you’re going to be that responsive to your patients.”

If you’ve done your homework, asked questions during the interview process, reviewed your notes and discussed your feelings with your family, making a decision should be easier and you won’t need to take much more time. The involved, exciting, anxiety-producing interview process has culminated in your reaching your goal of a job where you can be productive and happy. ■

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