

Fair game

An approach to the job fair for family medicine residents

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With an ever increasing demand for family physicians, job fairs are becoming a popular way to connect family medicine residents with potential practice opportunities. Many of us will quickly learn that our skills are in high demand, and there are numerous health jurisdictions that want to attract our services.

Job fairs are excellent opportunities to meet with health authorities, learn more about interested communities, and identify locum possibilities. But with seemingly endless booths and presenters, how can residents optimize their job fair experiences? This article provides a simple approach to physician job fairs based on our experiences as residents in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

Take your time and be prepared

- Job fairs are usually 2 to 4 hours long. It can be helpful to obtain a list of participating regions before attending the job fair. This can help ensure that you are able to “scout” and preview potential candidate regions you’re interested in.
- Presenters are trying to find primary care physicians for the communities they represent, live in, and love. It is a job that requires a lot of heart and dedication. Don’t expect to go window-shopping. People want your attention. They are keen to share as much information as possible about their hospitals and communities so plan to spend a minimum of 10 to 20 minutes per booth.
- Most jurisdictions provide tons of literature about their regions. A “green” approach might be to take business cards only. Many of the paper handouts that you receive will end up in the recycling bin.
- Presenters often have information that might be relevant to your partner; don’t forget to bring him or her along.

Ask the right questions

We devised a list of questions that we felt were relevant for a newly graduated family physician considering a move to a particular area or community. To ensure that you get the information you are most interested in, it can be helpful to have a jumping-off point for conversations with presenters. These questions can be grouped under 3 main umbrellas: 1) questions specific to family practice; 2) questions specific to local health systems; and 3) lifestyle questions. Obviously, you can’t cover all these points in a 10- to 20-minute interaction, and all

residents are going to have their own priorities when choosing practice locations. This list is intended to get you thinking about the factors that will be important to you when choosing a place to practise.

Family practice questions

- How many doctors are needed in the area? What is the average age of family doctors in your area? Are many doctors planning to retire in the next 5 years? How many family physicians have set up practice and left the area in the past 5 to 10 years?
- What is the average patient load of family practices in the area?
- What are the remuneration models for doctors in the area? What specific incentives (eg, financial incentives, clinic space) does this community offer?
- Are there call groups or practices open to accepting associate family doctors? How often are physicians on call? What are the call requirements for family doctors?
- Is there adequate and acceptable clinic space available? What is the expected monthly cost?
- Do any practices have electronic medical records in place? If not, what are the plans for the future use of this technology? Are there opportunities to develop electronic medical records?
- What are the opportunities for work outside of private practice? Are there opportunities to participate in long-term care, emergency department work, obstetrics, diabetes clinics, outpatient procedures, or assisting in the operating room?
- What are the opportunities for teaching medical students and residents? What are the family practice research opportunities?
- Are there any journal clubs for physicians in the community? What about continuing medical education sessions? Does the community have access to telehealth services?
- Are there currently any innovative primary care projects or initiatives in your community? Do you have any plans for future primary care projects? Are there



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any multidisciplinary clinics in your communities? Are there any opportunities for new family physicians to join them?

Local health care system questions


- What specialist services (eg, obstetrics and gynecology, general internal medicine, surgery) are available in your community? How many specialists have set up practices or left the area during the past 5 to 10 years?
- How long does it take for patients to see specialists? For example, how long do patients wait for internal medicine consultations, surgery, or exercise stress testing?
- How many acute care facilities are in the area? How many beds does each facility have? Do family physicians have hospital privileges at these facilities?
- What diagnostic services are available in your community?
- What are the administrative requirements (eg, committees, monthly meetings) in the community or hospital?
- How many patients currently do not have family physicians in your area? Does your acute care facility have an orphan list? How is this managed?
- Are satellite services from tertiary centres offered in your community? What services are offered?
- What is the turnover rate or retention rate for other health professions (eg, nurses, physiotherapists, laboratory technicians)?

Lifestyle questions

- How many people live in the community? Who are the main employers? What is the age structure (young families, retirement community, etc) of the community? How diverse is the community? Do physicians who practise in your area live in the community?
- What is the local school system like? How many schools are there? Are there any local colleges or universities?
- What kinds of recreational activities (eg, gyms, swimming pool, parks, walking trails, libraries) are available in the community?
- What is the cost of living in your community? What is the housing market like?
- Are there any potential job opportunities for partners or spouses? Are you able to help find work for my spouse?
- What are the best things about your community? What is a negative aspect of the community?

See for yourself

Last, a key step in choosing a place to practise is a site and community visit. If you are interested in a particular jurisdiction, it is worthwhile to plan a visit, elective, or locum in the area before making a long-term commitment to practise there. Job fairs often connect you with the people who can help make these visits happen, so be sure to ask.

Job fairs can be overwhelming but, with a little advance planning and time, they can be useful tools in preparing for practice after graduation. 

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Competing interests

None declared

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