

Recruiting Physicians Today

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DURING A CRISIS AND AFTER, EMPLOYMENT BRAND MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

Shawn Kessler, Managing Director, Aloysius Butler & Clark

It's safe to say our profession has never encountered the types of challenges COVID-19 has brought before. We've all seen the images of caregivers' faces bruised and worn by wearing their protective gear for hour after hour. Providers are working hours that seem unfathomable, while others are facing circumstances they could never have imagined — being asked to take a pay cut or furloughed. Nonclinical positions that just six months ago would have been considered recession-proof (physician recruiters, department heads, etc.) are now being laid off for two to four months throughout the country. And all of this is taking place during what is traditionally a peak time to recruit physicians and advanced practitioners into health care organizations.

With little confidence, and not wanting to go down the wrong path for our clients, I thought it would be a great idea to reach out to some colleagues who are charged with leading their organizations through these challenges to get their perspectives. I'm glad I did.

I was surprised by the responses to my questions. When I asked, "With a lot of groups pausing their recruitment efforts during one of the busiest recruitment times of the year, what do you think will happen when this breaks?" I assumed there would be a strong push to get candidates in as quickly as possible.

To John Larson, senior director of Provider Recruitment for GoHealth Urgent Care —with clinics throughout the country, including in New York City, San Francisco, and other major hot spots — the answer wasn't that easy. His thoughts were less focused on a significant push when the distancing measures are eased and focused more on what he and his recruitment team experienced during the crisis. "Many small and mid-sized urgent care clinics have closed their doors. GoHealth Urgent Care worked with each of its health system partners to adapt, focusing on continuing support for our communities. Providers noticed our resilience, stability, commitment to our communities, and our mission and values. Moving forward, more providers will factor these organizational qualities into their job-seeking decision-making."

The key takeaway? GoHealth Urgent Care's culture and employment brand are differentiating them from their competition and candidates are taking notice. Interestingly, this sentiment was repeated over and over again as I spoke with other industry leaders.

Candidates are seeing these organizations making good on the promises detailed in their recruitment materials. Recruitment leaders have faith that their branding will attract candidates that align with their mission and vision. And the push will happen naturally as candidates leave organizations that made missteps during this time. As a branding guy, I'm proud and embarrassed that I didn't think it would be that easy.

The next question was one that I've heard a lot of recruiters and department heads asking about: "What do

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you think will happen with most groups' recruitment budgets?" This time, the answers were a bit more diverse, but a common thread rang through.

Emerson Moses, MBA, CPRP, regional director of Clinical Talent Acquisition, Optum Health, had this to say: "Many hospitals and health care systems, often nonprofits, already run really tight budgets and disruptions to their forecast models can have a significant impact on nonclinical departments. Recruitment, unfortunately, tends to be an area where cuts are made first when finances take a hit because not every organization understands how directly the resources invested in provider recruitment can impact revenue downstream. I think what we're going to see is a mix — some organizations may lose their recruitment teams, some may see cuts due to either financial constraints or cutbacks on hiring targets, while other more sustainable and financially sound groups may see increased budgets due to a ramp-up in hiring and acquisition activity as a result of the 'new normal.'"

Other leaders echoed similar thoughts. Louis Caligiuri, executive director, Physician Recruiting and Contracting at North Shore Physicians Group, states that "across the industry, I think we'll see a lot of organizations cutting back on their recruitment budgets. Here there will be a strategic effort to look at alternative ways to source candidates and perform interviews, but our leadership team absolutely understands we are the growth engine of the organization."

Another colleague from a large, multistate health system in the Midwest (who asked not to be named) shared this: "Most organizations' recruitment budgets are going to be heavily scrutinized, if not decreased for the next few recruitment cycles. Hiring will be slow for organizations that do not have a strong employment value proposition [EVP]. And the brand equity and employment reputation of an organization, together with its



quality-of-care outcomes, will be competitive advantages to a post-COVID-19 jobseeker. There will need to be stronger alignment and trust between recruitment and marketing in the effort to maximize messages, budgets, and the media vehicles used to expose opportunities rapidly and efficiently to the marketplace. Everyone is going to need to focus on *attracting* talent, not just recruiting talent. We will see a renewed passion for the core tenets of medicine and thus will be focusing on pushing our employment brand as something that is purposeful and fulfilling and that you want to be a part of because it's in your DNA."

The consensus among the leaders I spoke to was budgets would be tightening. They believe their organization's expectations toward hiring will remain high, but they will need to attract the right talent more efficiently.

Hearing that expectations were still high and that most organizations are going to be tightening budgets, I found myself asking if the leaders thought recruitment teams would be forced to push hard during the summer to bring in talent. Summer is not traditionally a strong time of year for provider recruitment. Will candidates be looking because they weren't able to in the spring?

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This question, more than any other, provided the most diverse responses. Some organizations like North Shore Physicians Group haven't stopped recruiting during the pandemic. They have been using tools to perform virtual interviews and making offers to candidates without them having ever stepped on site. And they have focused heavily on making sure they keep their existing providers whole — with no cuts to benefits or bonuses.

Caligiuri believes the summer will be business as usual, but others, like Moses, see a different story unfolding. "I think provider recruitment teams are always pushed hard," Moses said. "What we do provides the bread and butter of our organizations. That said, we may see increased competition across the board for providers. Right now, while we are still actively recruiting at Optum, we are seeing a drastic decline in practicing provider jobseekers. Frankly, job hunting is not top of mind for most providers right now. I suspect there may be some residual impacts once this blows over that we'll feel as both jobseekers and organizations start to get their feet wet in the market again. We may see an uptick in demand but an even lower supply to meet that demand — possibly an impact of feeling less secure in making a change in an uncertain landscape — which means recruiters and organizations may need to get even more creative in filling their needs. I also think we're going to see increased efforts within organizations to retain their existing providers. Burnout (mental and physical), financial instability and uncertainty, and the psychological effects of these unprecedented times, as well as the impact on their families, may have providers re-evaluating the career decisions they have made."

Another response seemed to back up Moses's concerns regarding burnout and retention: "It's not about pushing hard; it's about prioritizing and focusing efforts in the right areas. If we choose not to focus on maintaining our providers' overall well-being and individual needs, it's going

to be extremely difficult to keep talent and continue to grow our employment brand. We must remain focused on the exceptional talent we have, nurture them, and allow them to become ambassadors of the recruitment journey."

One thing that seems to be consistent is the need to focus on the providers you have by keeping them happy, providing for their needs, and making sure you are keeping them in place so there is less need to recruit a replacement during uncertain times. Caligiuri believes North Shore Physicians Group's focus on keeping its providers happy will pay significant dividends as the organization moves forward: "Some places that aren't taking care of their providers may see them explore opportunities with a group like ours because of our ongoing commitment to our providers."

It was truly a blessing to call upon several of the friends I've made over the years in this industry to get their thoughts and opinions on what to expect as we move forward. While it's clear we are in uncertain times, it appears there are a few fundamental truths that we can all rely on:

1. Take care of the providers you have. This will prevent you from needing to recruit their replacements and may turn them into brand ambassadors for your organization, speaking to other physicians about how well your organization took care of them during difficult times.
2. Employment brand matters. When budgets are tightened and challenging times hit, your unique employment value proposition and reputation can help attract talent to your organization.

As Larson and I spoke, he made a statement that should make us all think: "The smartest providers will always have many options and are likely asking themselves, 'Am I proud to say I work here?'" If not, you may have a very long road ahead.

WHAT'S NEW AT NEJM GROUP?

COVID-19 Newsletter

As a trusted source for essential findings in medicine, the *New England Journal of Medicine* continues its work at the forefront of health care, providing the most relevant and reliable resources on the COVID-19 pandemic. Publishing new content almost daily, NEJM.org is seeing the most traffic in the history of the site, and we will continue to support the medical community in its battle against this virus. You are a valued recruitment partner, and we want to make you aware of a new e-newsletter resource that will update users on advancements in the COVID-19 contagion. This newsletter is available to all and detailed information can be found below.

To help physicians, allied providers, and public health professionals stay current with the latest developments in the coronavirus pandemic, the NEJM Group now publishes a free e-newsletter. Alerts will be delivered as needed (at least weekly) and will include new studies, correspondence, and other items in NEJM; NEJM Journal Watch summaries of key information from other sources; articles and podcasts from NEJM Catalyst; and

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important news stories from Physician's First Watch. The e-newsletter will also include links to external resources like the CDC and the WHO.

NEJM Group will send the newsletter for as long as it's helpful and necessary, continuing to shed light on the pandemic and its implications for medicine. If you'd like to receive this newsletter in the future, please visit the NEJM.org site and create an account (or log in to your existing account). Under My Account, make sure to check the box for General Information in the Alerts section.

PROMOTIONAL NOTES/NEWS

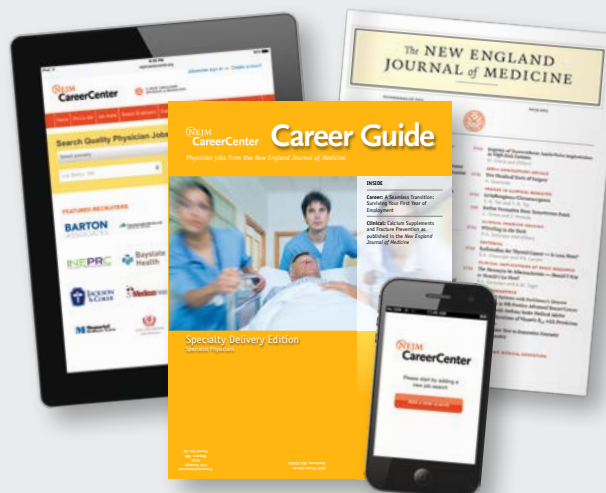
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This fall, over 30,000* physicians will enter into their last year of residency or fellowship and prepare to enter the workforce. Whether you are sourcing for primary care physicians or specialists, we've crafted multichannel package delivering this highly sought-after group. With one simple purchase you can maximize your reach to high prospects physicians via:

- 700,000+ targeted physicians via our network of clinical sites and opt-in emails
- 116,000 weekly readers within TWO consecutive print issues of the *New England Journal of Medicine*
- 30,000+ early-career physicians through our career guide magazines (see below)

Career Guide Edition	Deadline	Specialties	Audience
Specialty Delivery	8/14/20	CD, D, END, FM, GE, HEM/ONC, HOSP, ID, IM, NEP, N, ORS, ENT, PUD, DR, RHU, and U	Final-year residents and fellows, and physicians in practice 1–3 years
Residents and Fellows	9/18/20	All specialties — about 100	Final-year residents and fellows
Residents and Fellows	10/23/20	All specialties — about 100	Final-year residents and fellows

*Counts are based on data provided by the AMA and are subject to change.



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