NAVIGATING THE ONCOLOGY JOB SEARCH: **A COMPREHENSIVE WORKBOOK**

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Congratulations! You are nearing the end of your medical training and are ready to search for your first job. Finding your first job in the real world can feel like an unstructured and nebulous path. With this guide, we share our perspectives to help you navigate your journey.

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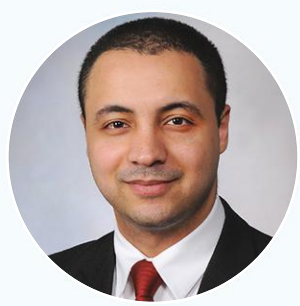

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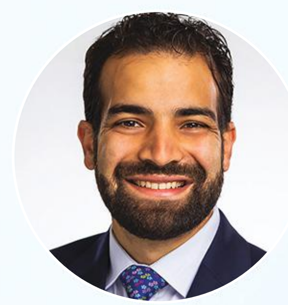

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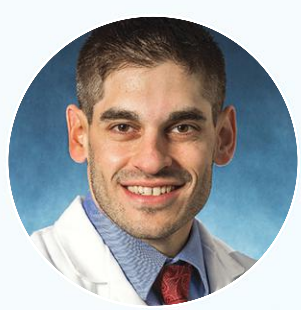

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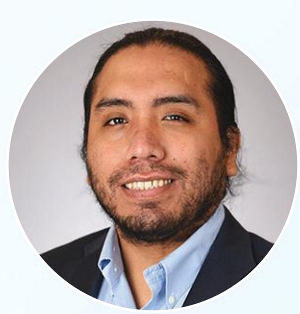

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USEFUL TIPS:

- Once you have an idea of the institutions/practices you are interested in, make a spreadsheet to keep you organized. This can include important names/emails (hematology/oncology division chief, subspecialty section head), connections or contacts established by yourself or your mentors, notes about the institution/practice, timeline, and thoughts/impressions.
- It is okay (and not uncommon) to switch disease site focus if other factors are greater priorities.
- Network, network, network. Reach out to any peers, early-career faculty, or former fellows from your institution for advice. Many of us found these individuals to be open, insightful, and extremely helpful during the job search process.

PREPARING

Before you begin your job search, the most important step is to reflect on your career goals and personal priorities to determine your overall vision for what career pathway is the best fit (e.g., academia, hybrid, community, industry, or government). Craft a brief personal mission statement. Talk to your mentors, family, friends, and colleagues to consider what aspects of a job are most important to you. You should start to think about these things early during your second year of fellowship. Important factors to consider in the job search are listed in Table 1. Many fellows will interview for jobs in multiple settings. Most jobs may not align perfectly with your specific goals/priorities. Distinguishing your wants versus needs and knowing what factors are non-negotiable will help you be more flexible in the job search and find the job that is the best fit for you.

APPLYING

Timing: While it is never too early to start thinking about your first job, consider making a list of institutions in the winter/early spring of your second year of fellowship and obtain feedback from your mentors. Consider emailing institutions in April and May to set up informal meetings with people during the ASCO Annual Meeting in June. If you are geographically restricted, in a dual-physician household where your partner will also need to find a job, or are not a U.S. citizen (see p. 41), you will need to start your job search even earlier.

In terms of job postings, timing will vary by institution and practice setting. Job postings in academia tend to revolve around the institution's fiscal year, with most recruitment occurring between August and November, though this also depends on other less predictable factors such as faculty leaving institutions and level of need. Some positions may not be formally advertised, especially in academia. For community or hybrid practices, positions are almost always listed and listed quickly. For any practice setting, it is always best to reach out early (before summer) to inquire, even if there are no open positions listed in your desired area.

Table 1: Important Factors to Consider in the Oncology Job Search

- **Type of practice setting** (e.g., academia, hybrid, community, industry, government)
- **Geographic location**
- **Focus on a particular disease site** (e.g., thoracic, breast, etc.)
- **Balance of clinical time vs. research time**
- **Clinical and research infrastructure**
- **Availability of mentors within your desired field**
- **Access to clinical trials**
- **Salary and benefits**
- **Costs of living**
- **Job availability for your partner**

Where to Look: In addition to asking your mentor to reach out on your behalf, consider using websites such as Google Jobs, NEJM Career Center (nejm-careercenter.org), and ASCO Career Center (career-center.asco.org). For community practice positions, the Association of Community Cancer Centers and Community Oncology Alliance have helpful websites. LinkedIn and Doximity (make sure your profiles are up to date) can be helpful for getting noticed, especially by recruiters from industry and community practices. Use multiple sources to cast a wide net, as positions may be listed on one website but not another. Sign up for email alerts from these websites (using specific search criteria/key words) so you can easily learn when new job listings are posted. Reach out to any fellows or junior faculty you may know at institutions you are interested in, as they may have advance knowledge of openings that would only be known internally.

Most importantly, the ASCO Annual Meeting, held in June, and other national conferences are prime opportunities to meet potential future employers and can open many doors. Ask mentors to introduce you to others and email disease group leaders from institutions of interest to set up informational meetings during these conferences. If you are able, attend national conferences during your second year to grow your network.

CV and Cover Letters: Make sure your CV is up to date and well organized. If your institution has a faculty CV template, follow that format to highlight your academic record. Draft a cover letter template before you meet with your mentor. Cover letters should be addressed to the division chief of hematology/oncology (if academic), the cancer institute president (for hybrid practices), or the hiring physician (for a community practice). A general template for cover letters includes:

- ***Paragraph 1: Introduction.*** Describe yourself, including your current position and the type of position you are interested in.
- ***Paragraphs 2 and 3: Body.*** Discuss your background and how you developed your specific career interests, accomplishments prior to and during fellowship that are pertinent to your career interests, and your clinical and research experience.
- ***Paragraph 4: Conclusion.*** Outline your long-term career goals, the type of institution/practice you are looking to practice in, and how your skills and experience contribute to the vision and culture of the specific institution/practice to which you are applying. You can also include any pertinent personal factors that tie you to a particular institution or geographic region.

USEFUL TIPS:

- Remember that first impressions matter. Always be respectful and professional in all interactions (including social events). Close the loop in any communications throughout your job search.
- Reach out early to any institutions you would at least strongly consider and conduct a screening interview, if offered. You may decide not to proceed after that if the position or institution does not align with your goals—and that is completely fine. Do not wait until the fall to contact places you may be less interested in if your first choices do not work out. By then, potential opportunities may be more limited.
- Institutions may not know that you have applied for a position through an online system, as that usually goes through a recruiting agency or a human resources department. If you do not hear back about your online application after about 2 weeks, email the contact listed in the job advertisement and/or the division chief.
- While each institution and practice has their own recruitment timeline, in general, the job search process in academia involves multiple steps and will likely extend over several months. The process for hybrid/community practices is typically more streamlined and on a shorter timeline.
- Keep in mind that positions can open up at any time throughout the year. If an institution replies they do not have a job open currently, but one may open later, make sure to follow up if you are interested and have not finalized your search.
- It is not uncommon for academic institutions to start recruiting several months in advance. Be aware that there might be “gaps” in communication lasting several weeks. It is okay to reach out every 3 to 4 weeks to remind them of your continued interest and to obtain an update. If you have not received any concrete updates after reaching out twice, talk to your mentor about how to proceed.

Have your mentor and other trusted advisors review your CV and cover letter. Letters should be concise (maximum one page), strong, and error-free, as they will serve as a first impression for potential employers. Tailor your cover letter to each institution/practice (e.g., emphasizing research experience for academic positions vs. clinical experience for community practice).

Making Contact: Once you have met with your mentor to review your list of institutions/practices, CV, and cover letter, have your mentor email their known contacts at the places you are interested in to inquire about open positions. Send your mentor your updated CV since they will usually attach this in their emails. For community or hybrid practices, reach out directly to the practice's physician recruiter (listed in the job advertisement) to send your CV and tailored cover letter.

After the initial email, allow for a week to hear back before following up. Most people respond quickly about whether there is an open position or not. If there is an open position, the contact will generally let your mentor know who you will need to contact (make sure to have your CV and tailored cover letter for that specific institution ready). For hybrid and community practices, the practice's physician recruiter will guide you through the recruitment process.

If there is an open position, the usual initial step will be for you to have a phone or video call (sometimes referred to as a screening interview) with the subspecialty section head (for academic institutions) or physician recruiter (for hybrid/community practices). These are typically arranged within 1 to 2 weeks of applying. After the screening interviews, if the position seems like a good fit and you are interested in proceeding, make sure to ask about next steps.

INTERVIEWING

We will address the different academic and hybrid/community interview processes separately, but the following general advice applies to all settings.

Be Prepared: Create a document containing commonly asked interview questions to go through and answer. You do not want to be scripted during

Distinguishing your wants versus needs and knowing what factors are non-negotiable will help you be more flexible in the job search and find the best fit.

interviews, but you should be prepared for a range of questions that you may encounter. Having a succinct mission statement summarizing who you are, how you developed your specific interests, what you have done in fellowship related to your interests, your long-term career goals, and what you are looking to bring to each institution/practice will help you achieve your goals. Preparing for the above will help you answer the very common "tell me about yourself" question. Regardless of practice setting, you will interview with many people, and the process may come to feel like speed dating. Think of your mission statement as your unique sales pitch.

Do Your Research Prior to Interviews: Know the institution/practice (size of department/practice, leaders, available career tracks) and your interviewers (backgrounds, specialty areas, research interests, any mutual connections, etc.). Talk to people you know, such as faculty at your institution, colleagues, or former fellows, who may be familiar with the reputation and inner workings of the institution/practices to which you are applying. Come prepared with a list of questions to ask interviewers. Having a few sincere questions to ask at the end of each interview conveys interest and demonstrates preparedness.

Special Considerations in Academia: Following a screening interview, there are usually two rounds of interviews for academic positions.

The first round of interviews usually consists of several 20- to 30-minute interviews with various faculty within your desired subspecialty, the chief of the hematology/oncology division, and members of the faculty search committee. As a result of the pandemic, many institutions are conducting the first round of interviews virtually. Following the first round, the search committee will generally decide within 1 to 3 weeks who will be invited for a second round of interviews. If you do not hear back, consider following up after 3 to 4 weeks to express your continued interest.

The second round of interviews will typically occur on campus, often over a 2-day period (plus travel time). You will meet with additional faculty and staff and give a job talk (more on that below). Not all candidates are invited to attend in-person interviews, so being invited is a good sign that the institution is interested in you. Significant time and resources are involved in arranging on-campus visits, thus only consider going for an on-campus visit if you are seriously considering the institution. This visit is a crucial opportunity to learn more about the department and evaluate if it is a good fit for you. It is also an opportunity to learn more about the community, and an institution will often set you up with a real estate agent to explore the area. At the end of your on-campus visit, you should inquire about the expected timeline going forward, as this varies and may extend over a period of months. The search committee will typically meet again once all invited candidates have completed their second round of interviews to decide on the candidate(s) to whom offers will be extended. It is important to let institutions know if you are truly interested in the position once you have interviewed. Talk to your mentors about when and how to follow up.

Job Talk: The job talk is an opportunity to demonstrate your enthusiasm, ability to communicate articulately, critical thinking skills, and potential to become an independent researcher and contributing faculty member. The talk is typically 30 to 45 minutes long, followed by 10 to 15 minutes for audience questions. Prior to your on-campus visit, you should inquire about expectations for the job talk (allotted time, content, audience) and logistics of how the talk will be given. You should present a clear and concise story of your past, present, and future research and how it aligns with your career trajectory. Discussing future directions for your research that stem from your past and present work is an opportunity to high-

USEFUL TIPS:

- Keep your main mentors updated throughout the process, as they can help guide you.
- Job interviews start the second you establish contact with someone from the institution. Always be polite, professional, honest, and respectful to every single individual you encounter, whether via email, phone, virtually, or in person.
- In your interview responses, focus on the "why" and not just the "what" and "how": demonstrate what you have learned and how you have grown through your experiences.
- Even if you do not have clinical or research experience in a specific area, you can demonstrate that you have the drive and skills needed to undertake these based upon your prior and current clinical/research experiences.
- Highlight any connections you may have to the geographic location in which you are interviewing, or emphasize why you want to live there. Employers typically prefer to recruit physicians who are more likely to stay in the area long-term.
- For academic positions: Ask about the breakdown of research/clinical time and expectations for independent funding to support your salary. Think about what your unique role/niche would be within the division and inquire about mentorship and junior faculty career development programs that would help you be successful. Consider if the institution has the necessary clinical and research infrastructure that you need to succeed. Talk to junior faculty to see if they feel supported. Consider the rate of faculty turnover; if high, ask why. Evaluate if faculty are being promoted on an appropriate timeline.
- For hybrid/community positions: Understand the patient mix and volume you will be expected to see, the reporting structure within the practice, and tracks to becoming a partner in the practice (if relevant). Hybrid or satellite jobs of large academic centers often have unique opportunities to do research. Ask physicians if they feel supported.
- For all practice settings: Ask about administrative and clinical support, requirements for inpatient/outpatient time, practice sites/hospitals, and coverage of patient care on non-clinical days. These are good questions to ask during your in-person visit if not shared earlier.
- If you are unable to proceed with the remainder of the interview process due to timing or accepting another offer, let the division chief and subspecialty section head know via phone call or email immediately. Be gracious and thank the committee for their time and consideration of your candidacy.
- For additional details about navigating the interview process including what questions to ask and how to ask them (specifically for academia), we recommend "Finding Your First Oncology Job: A Mini-Workbook for Career Success" by Dr. Mina Sedrak.[1]

light that you are forward-thinking and how your interests can uniquely contribute to the department. You should also tailor your presentation to your audience and institution. Have your trusted mentors revise, focus, practice, and review your talk with you. Being prepared with clear answers to audience questions is as important as the talk itself. Practice as much as you can beforehand, and do not go over the allotted time. Have your job talk prepared by early fall of the third year of fellowship since the majority of in-person visits occur between the late fall and winter.

Special Considerations for Hybrid/Community Practices: Following a screening interview with the recruiter, there will usually be two rounds of interviews for hybrid/community positions.

The first round of interviews is similar to those in academia, except you will meet with the president or subspecialty section leader of the practice and other physicians within the practice. These interviews will likely be virtual. You will be asked about your preferred practice setting, balance of inpatient/outpatient activities, and clinical experience. If both you and the practice are interested in proceeding, they will invite you for a site visit and in-person interviews.

For the second round of interviews, the practice will arrange for you to visit the practice in person over a 2- to 3-day period (plus travel). You will be able to meet with other physicians in the practice, learn about the area, meet with a realtor, etc. You do not need to give a job talk for community or hybrid positions. This visit is an opportunity for you to evaluate your fit within the practice. It is not uncommon for candidates to be offered the position during their in-person visit—you will not need to accept the offer on the spot. In general, hybrid/community practice interviews are less formal, hiring decisions are less hierarchical, and the timeline is shorter.

OFFERS, CONTRACTS, AND NEGOTIATIONS

For academic positions, the timing between your second round of interviews and receiving an offer is variable and can range from days to months. For hybrid/community practices, offers are usually made within 1 to 2 weeks of in-person interviews, if not during the in-person visit itself.

Academic jobs will give offer letters, while hybrid/community practices will either give offer letters followed by traditional contracts or just traditional contracts.

An offer letter is generally a 1- to 2-page concise version of a contract with less legal jargon. A typical offer letter will include the specific position that you are being offered; tentative start date; reporting structure; clinical and research responsibilities (e.g., service time and number of clinic days, independent funding expectations); process for faculty appointment (if applicable); salary; support (administrative, clinical, research, start-up funds); benefits; amount of annual vacation time and conference time; travel allowances; financial allowances (coverage of license renewals or professional dues); non-compete clauses; and any pre-employment requirements (such as health screening or certifications).

Other aspects that you should clarify if not included in an offer letter or contract include practice sites, sign-on bonus (if any), moving expenses, whether compensation is RVU-based, specifics of non-compete clauses (this is especially important in large metropolitan areas), escape clauses (how much notice is required before leaving for another job), start-up funding, and duration of salary protection. For hybrid/community practices specifically, you should clarify the expectations for becoming a partner in the practice (if applicable) and what happens if the practice is sold before you become a partner.

Job interviews start the second you establish contact with someone from the institution. Always be polite, professional, honest, and respectful to every single individual you encounter.

When deliberating between job offers, review the job aspects discussed in the beginning of this article within the scope of your needs versus wants. While each person's priorities will be different and no job is perfect, the job you choose should be a good fit, aligning with your values and goals and incorporating mentorship and infrastructure to promote your career success.

Have several of your trusted mentors in various career stages review your offer letter/contract. Additionally, some of us compared offers with co-fellows and friends who were going through the job search at the same time. Your mentors can advise you on what you should and should not negotiate. Often, the aspects of the offer that can be negotiated will depend on the practice setting.

Salary (starting and what it would be in 2 to 3 years) is an important consideration and will vary depending on practice setting and geographic location. Unfortunately, accurate and updated salary reports are not easily available. Talk to former fellows from your institution to get an idea of the typical salary in different practice settings and geographic locations. Your program directors, division chief, and mentors may also have a good sense of typical salaries, as they get feedback from their recently graduated fellows. In general, salary in academic settings is typically determined by the university and standardized based on faculty rank, so it is less negotiable. Many academic institutions use the AAMC Faculty Salary Reports as a benchmark. Salaries are generally lower in academic settings due to the decreased amount of clinical time. In contrast, the salary at hybrid/community practices is typically higher and more negotiable. Do your research ahead of time to know the typical salary for your position in different geographic locations so that you do not appear unreasonable in your negotiations.

Other job aspects that are often negotiated include clinical and administrative support, service time, number of clinical days, amount of protected time, start-up funds, funds for CME or education, moving expenses, and start date.

If you have multiple offers, you can use aspects from different offers as leverage in your negotiations (e.g., another offer covered moving expenses or provided more start-up funds). Approach negotiations from a mutual benefit standpoint: for example, when negotiating for increased start-up funds, justify this by explaining how these funds would help you jumpstart your specific research project and how this will benefit the institution.

USEFUL TIPS:

- Generally, you should have 2 to 4 weeks to respond to an offer, but this will vary depending on the institution/practice and your personal circumstances.
- Be transparent about your timeline and if you have any additional interviews that you would like to attend before making a decision. Most employers are understanding and are willing to work with you.
- Timing may become a factor if you have multiple concurrent offers. If there is an institution that you have interviewed at and are truly interested in, but have not heard back from, you can contact them to let them know that you have another offer but are still interested. This may or may not accelerate the process, but it is worth trying.
- Some wonderful job opportunities may become available right as you are about to sign an offer. That is the nature of the physician job market. Ultimately, the timing or logistics may not work out, and the deadlines for your other offer(s) become the deciding factor.
- Once you have decided that you are going to decline an offer, be courteous and let the institution/practice know immediately, as they may wish to offer the position to another candidate.
- Out of respect, when accepting or declining an offer, arrange for it to be done over the phone with the hiring physician, if possible. You want to keep doors open for the future.
- In academia especially, there is a lot that is out of your control, including what an institution is looking for, the pool of candidates applying, funding, etc. There will often be several excellent candidates, and the process for selecting which candidates are extended job offers can feel opaque. Ultimately, institutions and candidates are looking for the best mutual fit. Things often tend to work themselves out in the end, but it is always good to have a Plan B should a certain job opportunity not work out.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Visit the Trainee & Early Career section of *ASCO Connection* to read about navigating the job search, interviewing, giving a great job talk, and conducting negotiations (connection.asco.org/tec).
- Read ASCO's book on career development: *Achieving Career Success in Oncology: A Practical Guide*.
- Attend professional development panel talks, roundtable discussions, and mentoring meetings in the ASCO Trainee and Early Career Oncologist Member Lounge during the ASCO Annual Meeting and other trainee networking opportunities at national meetings.
- Sign up for mock interview sessions with faculty through ASCO. Hosted annually, trainees can visit the ASCO Trainee & Fellow Resources webpage (asco.org/career-development/trainee-fellow-resources) in August 2022 to learn more and sign up.
- Visit the University of Pennsylvania Career Services website (careerservices.upenn.edu), which has helpful resources for preparing application materials and navigating the academic job search.

When negotiating, it is helpful to craft a formal response to an offer letter. Try to batch your questions/negotiated items into one document or meeting. As always, be diplomatic and respectful in your negotiations so that you do not come off as demanding and unrealistic.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR NON-U.S. CITIZENS

There are a few—but highly significant—considerations related to the job search for fellows who are on visas. In general, there are two main visas that physicians who are not U.S. citizens utilize to pursue training in the United States: the H1B visa and the J1-visa. We will focus on J-1 visas as they are the most commonly used for medical training (12,506 physicians in 2020) and are accompanied by specific requirements and restrictions.[2,3]

The J-1 visa allows holders to remain in the U.S. for up to 7 years, or until they complete their medical training. Upon completion, J-1 visa holders are required under U.S. immigration law (Immigration and Nationality Act, Section 212(e)) to return to their home country for 2 years before re-entering the United States for the purposes of work. Alternatively, these visa holders may attempt to obtain a J-1 waiver to the Two-Year Home-Country Physical Presence Requirement.[4]

J-1 waiver applications for physicians usually fall under one of the following bases:

1. Request by a designated state public health department or its equivalent (Conrad 30 waiver program).
2. Exceptional hardship to a U.S. citizen (or lawful permanent resident) spouse or child of an exchange visitor.
3. Persecution.
4. Request by an interested U.S. federal government agency.
5. The Appalachian Regional Council and Mississippi Delta Authority are federally designated as high need areas and thus are exempt from the Conrad 30 cap—institutions located within these geographical areas have an easier time obtaining waivers for and recruiting candidates on J-1 visas.

The Conrad 30 waiver program is the most commonly used mechanism to continue work in the U.S. and was originally designed to address the shortage of physicians in medically underserved areas. The program allows each state health department to sponsor up to 30 foreign physicians per year who must agree to work in that area for 3 years, after which they can apply for permanent resident status.

Most states give highest preference to primary care specialties, such as internal medicine, family medicine, pediatrics, and psychiatry, with some states filling the entirety of their allotted slots with primary care specialists. This further limits the states in which subspecialists with advanced fellowship training can work. In addition, many employers may be unwilling to hire candidates with a Conrad 30 waiver because of the relatively prolonged and costly process associated with the waiver. As a result of the complex and competitive nature of the waiver program, fellows are advised to secure employment as early in their second year of fellowship as possible to ensure a waiver slot can be obtained.

Ultimately, you will need to apply and aim to sign offers very early, if possible. Reach out directly to fellow non-U.S. citizens who have gone through the process in the past and to institutions/practices that have previously hired non-U.S. citizens. Strongly consider contacting an immigration lawyer early in the process. Most large institutions will have a lawyer on staff that can offer advice. Alternatively, you may seek independent legal counsel. Immigration law changes over the years and expert advice can prove crucial when considering an offer.

CLOSING ADVICE

While the job search may seem daunting and overwhelming, it is an exciting time to reflect on all that you have accomplished. Make sure to take care of yourself and have a good support system throughout the process. Reflecting on your passions and what drives you can help keep you centered. Although exhausting, interviewing at multiple places and meeting many individuals can lead to future professional collaborations and friendships. Savor these experiences and keep doors open for the future.

From our collective experiences, the best fit is often not what you picture as "the perfect job," but where you are appreciated, valued, celebrated, and wanted. Do not fall into the all-or-nothing trap. Keep an open mind while staying true to what is most important to you. It is best to remember that every job is a deal: a deal between what you hope to get out of your work (meaning, purpose, growth) and what your employer hopes to get out of you (excellent patient care, scientific contributions to your field, etc.).

Once you have signed your offer letter or contract, take time to relax and CELEBRATE! Be proud of all that you have accomplished to get to this huge milestone in life. We are excited for all of you and look forward to celebrating your successes.

Acknowledgments:

We would like to thank the entire ASCO Trainee and Early Career Advisory Group, ASCO staff, and numerous mentors, fellows, and early-career physicians who have helped guide our own job searches.

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