



PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Toolbox



Recruitment Toolbox: 10 Cardinal Rules

Andy Tau, MD, Lanre Jimoh MD, MBA, and Syed Hussain, MD

Introduction

Human capital is the cornerstone of success in any healthcare enterprise. In gastroenterology, the challenge of finding the right people has never been greater due to a significant mismatch between workforce demand and supply. This toolkit offers a comprehensive guide to help gastroenterology divisions and practices recruit top candidates and build successful teams.

Rule #1: This is a Candidate's Market

In today's market, there are approximately three job opportunities for each graduating gastroenterology (GI) fellow in the U.S. In 2022 alone, 588 GI fellows completed their training, yet over 1,630 full-time gastroenterologist positions remain unfilled, according to the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis.¹ Several factors contribute to this shortage:

- **Supply Constraints:** An aging gastroenterologist population, post-pandemic burnout, retirements, and stagnant fellowship positions.
- **Increasing Demand:** An aging American population, increasing prevalence of GI diseases and a reduction in the recommended age for colon cancer screenings.

Given this landscape, employers must recognize that candidates hold a more advantageous position in the job market.



Rule #2: Know Thyself

Begin by defining your organization's culture, reputation, market competition, population growth, and location desirability with honesty. Avoid assuming that your organization is the best in every aspect. Categorize these elements into positive and negative aspects and ensure that all partners and associates are aligned on key talking points before interviewing candidates. Transparency is crucial, especially on potentially negative topics, such as why some associates may not have advanced to partnership. Mixed messages can create uncertainty and raise red flags.

Rule #3: Recruit Early and Actively by Casting Wide and Narrow Nets

Recruitment efforts should start during the candidates' second year of fellowship, with many practices offering sign-on bonuses or monthly stipends during training. By the middle of their third year, most fellows have typically secured positions. Anticipated retirements should prompt recruitment efforts two years in advance. Lateral hires—experienced physicians looking to switch practices—should also be seriously considered, as they often present rare and flexible opportunities.

- **Wide Net:** Target candidates beyond local geography through word-of-mouth, national recruiting firms, GI journal ads, national conferences, social media, and a prominent "Careers" link on your website.
- **Narrow Net:** Focus on local talent by building relationships with local GI fellowship programs, hosting educational dinners, volunteering as adjunct faculty, and maintaining a strong presence in local GI societies.

For candidates seeking to return home after training or local physicians looking for a change, your group's involvement at both local and national levels increases the likelihood of connecting through overlapping networks.

Rule #4: Diversity/Inclusion is Gold

The importance of diversity and inclusion in your team cannot be overstated. Since this article focuses on practice management (as opposed to clinical outcomes), we will discuss the benefits of diversity and inclusion to the GI practice.



A diverse group of physicians not only enhances financial outcomes by attracting patients who look like their physicians but also improves recruitment in a self-fulfilling manner. Similarly, a candidate gravitates towards a partner who looks like the candidate, or shares the same experiences, culture, and background. The partner becomes the “hook” that lands a successful signing. Highlighting your explicit commitment to diversity and inclusion can be a powerful recruitment tool if you do not have such a “hook.” This strategy may also help with retention efforts if your current partner sees that the practice values diversity and inclusion.

Rule #5: Be Transparent about the 3 C’s: Compensation, Call, and Culture

Be upfront about compensation structures, benefits, and call schedules. Any lack of transparency is a red flag for candidates. Share average earnings of de-identified physicians at various career stages and current buy-ins for ancillary services, with appropriate disclaimers about potential changes by the time the candidate reaches partnership.

Equally important is the distribution of call responsibilities. A practice where call burdens are shared equally among all members, regardless of seniority, is more attractive to candidates. Additionally, discuss the organization’s culture, focusing on camaraderie, support, and collegiality among partners.

Rule #6: Roll Out the Red Carpet

When it’s time for the interview, make candidates feel valued from the moment they arrive. Consider offering a personal driver from the airport and minimize travel costs for the candidate. Some employers conduct an initial virtual interview followed by an in-person interview, which ideally includes an adjoining weekend for candidates to explore the city.

During the in-person interview, invite the candidate’s family, arrange for a real-estate agent, and create a bespoke experience based on the candidate’s interests. Personal touches, such as a guided city tour or a special dinner, can leave a lasting impression. As they say, people may forget what you say or what you do but they do not forget how you made them feel.



Rule #7: Avoid Putting a Square Peg in a Round Hole

Retention is as important as recruitment. Physicians who completed training within the last six years often stay in their first jobs for only two years. Transparency during recruitment, especially regarding key job features like compensation and call responsibilities, reduces the risk of early departures.

Matching a candidate to the right organizational culture is crucial. Some candidates may be uninterested in the business side of medicine, while others may have entrepreneurial aspirations. Compensation models must also align with the candidate's expectations and values. For instance, some practices evenly split revenue, while others operate on a purely RVU or other compensation model.

Candidates with advanced endoscopy training should be provided with clear projections of the procedures they will perform annually. This transparency is essential, as these candidates have invested significant time and income in acquiring these additional skills.

Rule #8: Work-Life Balance is the Rule, Not the Exception

Quality of life is increasingly important to today's candidates, often outweighing the pursuit of higher income. Resist any temptation to dismiss these concerns as indicative of laziness or lack of commitment. Instead, highlight your organization's efforts to promote work-life balance, such as providing advanced practice providers (APPs) for weekend or call support, AI-scribes, or options to pay others for taking on-call duties.

Rule #9: Market Opportunities for Growth (Career and Personal)

Clearly define the sources of new patients and explain why your group is hiring, whether due to upcoming retirements, long patient waitlists, or expansion projects. Show candidates the financial trajectory for new partners and ask if they have unique skills or interests, they wish to develop.

For candidates who are not interested in extracurricular activities, emphasize that there is no pressure to engage in these if undesired. Pair candidates with partners who share similar backgrounds or interests, and introduce them to local religious, ethnic, or sports communities to support their personal growth.



Rule #10: Follow-Up with Clear Next Steps

At the end of the interview, clearly communicate the selection process timeline and when candidates can expect feedback. If a candidate stands out, consider expressing this or even extending an early offer. In a candidate's market, waiting too long can be costly. Be cautious with "exploding offers," which impose a hard time limit for acceptance. These offers can backfire, especially in today's competitive market, and may damage your reputation if you later need to renegotiate with a candidate.

Conclusion

By adhering to these "10 Cardinal Rules," employers can optimize their recruitment strategies and attract ideal candidates. Remember, the goal is not just to sign candidates, but to ensure they feel confident that your practice aligns with their long-term aspirations, encouraging them to stay and thrive within your organization.

References

1. Health Resources & Services Administration. National and regional projections of supply and demand for internal medicine subspecialty practitioners: 2013-2025. Available at: <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/dataresearch/internal-medicine-subspecialty-report.pdf>.