

Administration of Emergency Medicine



A SURVEY OF ACADEMIC EMERGENCY MEDICINE DEPARTMENT CHAIRS ON HIRING NEW ATTENDING PHYSICIANS

Ryan D. Aycock, MD, MS,* Moshe Weizberg, MD,* Barry Hahn, MD,* Kera F. Weiserbs, PHD,† and
Brahim Ardolic, MD*

*Department of Emergency Medicine, and †Department of Academic Affairs, Staten Island University Hospital, Staten Island, New York
Reprint Address: Ryan D. Aycock, MD, MS, Department of Emergency Medicine, Staten Island University Hospital, 475 Seaview Avenue, Staten
Island, NY 10305

Abstract—Background: For graduating emergency medicine (EM) residents, little information exists as to what attributes department chairs are seeking in hiring new attendings. **Study Objectives:** To determine which qualities academic EM department chairs are looking for when hiring a new physician directly out of residency or fellowship. **Methods:** An anonymous 15-item Web-based survey was sent to the department chairs of all accredited civilian EM residency programs in March of 2011. The questions assessed the desirability of different candidate attributes and the difficulty in recruiting EM-trained physicians. Respondents were also asked to give the current number of available job openings. **Results:** Fifty-five percent of eligible department chairs responded. On a 5-point scale, the most important parts of a candidate's application were the interview (4.8 ± 0.4), another employee's recommendation (4.7 ± 0.5), and the program director's recommendation (4.5 ± 0.7). The single most important attribute possessed by a candidate was identified as "Ability to work in a team," with 58% of respondents listing it as their top choice. Advanced training in ultrasound was listed as the most sought-after fellowship by 55% of the chairs. Overall, department chairs did not have a difficult time in recruiting EM-trained physicians, with 56% of respondents stating that they had no current job openings. **Conclusion:** How a physician relates to others was consistently rated as the most important part of the candidate's application. However, finding a job in academic EM is difficult, with graduates having limited job prospects. © 2014 Elsevier Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

Several resources are currently available to guide applicants on how to gain acceptance into medical school and residency. To advise applicants seeking to match into emergency medicine (EM) residency programs, authors have interviewed program directors and faculty to determine which factors are most important in selecting new residents (1,2). Similar guides exist for program directors providing information on which candidate attributes correlate with successful choices (3,4). However, for graduating residents seeking a position as an attending physician, there is a paucity of information on what attributes emergency department (ED) chairs are seeking. A search strategy on PubMed using ("emergency medicine" OR "emergency physician") AND (employment OR job OR hiring OR position) demonstrates that the only available literature consists of either interviews with single decision-makers regarding what characteristics they look for in selecting new candidates at a single institution, or personal narratives with unsubstantiated claims (5–7). This information may not be generalizable to other EDs or other geographic locations, leaving

graduating residents with insufficient guidance when applying for their first job after graduation.

If graduating residents know what prospective employers are looking for in attending candidates, they will be able to more strategically plan their job search and application, and may be in a better position to decide whether or not to pursue a job in academics. In addition, this information would allow residency directors to design their programs to make their graduates more competitive in the marketplace.

This study seeks to determine what criteria academic department chairs look for when hiring new attendings directly out of residency or fellowship.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We conducted an anonymous, online survey of all academic EM department chairs in the United States (US) between March 1, 2011 and April 30, 2011. No incentives were offered. The Institutional Review Board of our hospital approved this study.

All 153 accredited nonmilitary, US emergency medicine residency programs were identified using the American Medical Association's FREIDA database (8). Our home institution was excluded from this study, as our chair is a co-author, leaving 152 eligible respondents. No power analysis was calculated, as the entire study population was included.

FREIDA, the Association of Academic Chairs of Emergency Medicine, as well as individual department Web sites, were searched for e-mail addresses for all department chairs (9). Individualized e-mails were then sent to each chair in March of 2011, with a link to the Web site of the survey (www.surveymonkey.com). In cases where contact information could not be located, the residencies' program coordinators were e-mailed and asked to forward the link to the department chair. A follow-up e-mail was sent in April to encourage chairpersons who had not replied to take the survey. This subsequent mailing included a prompt to prevent initial respondents from filling out the survey a second time.

The survey was built for a larger project to assess the hiring landscape of all American EDs, both academic and community. It is a Web-based 15-item questionnaire that inquires about hospital demographics and factors that might influence hiring decisions. The survey was created by two emergency physicians (R.D.A. and M.W.) after identifying four domains that were perceived to be important during the hiring process: gathering information from the applicant (i.e., the interview), gathering information from others (e.g., recommendations), the location where the candidate trained, and the broad category of additional candidate attributes such as fellowship training, productivity, and personality. It was critically re-

viewed by a group of emergency physicians, including our institution's department chair. Based on this initial assessment, further revisions and modifications were instituted.

The candidate attributes section uses a 5-point Likert scale to determine which elements the respondent considers important when hiring a new attending physician. Chairs were also asked to give the current number of job openings, to rank candidate attributes, and to list sought-after fellowships. Free text responses were allowed for these last two questions. A list of all of the EM fellowships currently accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) was listed for convenience. We also listed subspecialties that are currently on track to receive accreditation (e.g., emergency medical services). Although not accredited, ultrasound was included due to its high number of fellowships. The survey is included as an [Appendix](#).

Data were compiled and analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2007 (Microsoft, Inc., Redmond, WA). For items using a Likert scale, a weighted average was calculated, along with the standard deviation.

RESULTS

Surveys were sent to all of the nation's 152 department chairs. We received 84 responses, giving a response rate of 55%. [Table 1](#) shows how chairs ranked the importance of various elements of the application, where 1 represents "Not at all important" and 5 represents "Extremely important." SDs are given to demonstrate consistency. When asked to rate the difficulty in hiring an EM-trained physician in their area on a scale from 1 to 5, the mean result was 2.5 ± 1.3 .

Thirty-five chairpersons cited at least one job opening: two chairs noted that they had more than six positions available, four had three to six spots available, and 29 had one to two job openings. Forty-five respondents (56%) denied having any open positions. Four did not respond to this question.

We asked, "What three attributes (in order) would you say are the most important qualities for a new hire to possess?" Respondents could choose from a list or write in an answer. Eighty-one responses were received. The results are ranked and listed in [Figure 1](#).

When asked to list any fellowships they seek when hiring new attending physicians, 67 (80%) of the chairs responded. More than one choice could be selected. The results are ranked and listed in [Figure 2](#).

DISCUSSION

Our results suggest that EM department chairs consider subjective impressions of applicants as the most

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