



February 2010

Pediatric Specialists Can't Match Demand

By: Misti Crane

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Frustrated parents with sick children are waiting months for appointments with medical specialists. Others, seeking the best treatment for complicated illnesses, travel hours for care.

Leaders of the nation's pediatric hospitals say they're struggling with shortages and vacancies in many specialty areas.

Doctors who specialize in neurology, development and behavioral problems, diabetes, lung disease and intestinal disorders are in the highest demand, according to a survey of children's hospitals late last year by the National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions.

And demand for some of those specialties is skyrocketing. Pediatric endocrinologists, in particular, could seemingly work around the clock and not catch up with the backlog of newly diagnosed diabetes cases.

"I probably get two requests every month about a job opening whether I'm interested or not," said Dr. William Riley, director of the diabetes and endocrinology center at Akron Children's Hospital.

The hospital recently doubled the number of pediatric endocrinologists to four, and they have four nurse practitioners who care for established patients and help manage the influx of new ones. But a child who is not in a crisis still waits a month to see someone, Riley said.

In Columbus, Nationwide Children's Hospital is training more specialists and then trying to persuade the doctors to stay there, said Dr. John Mahan, a pediatric nephrologist and director of the pediatric residency and pediatric nephrology fellowship programs.

The hospital had eight subspecialty programs in 2000. Now, 42 programs are training 79 fellows. Training provides an additional benefit, he said: Established, talented specialists often like to work where they can help train up-and-comers.

Still, waiting times for patients can be long in certain specialties.

"It can be weeks or two or three months. Families are not thrilled about that," Mahan said. Others sometimes have to travel, especially if their children have rare disorders.

In some ways, Ohio is faring well. The state is home to six children's hospitals, meaning most specialists are within a couple of hours' drive for everyone.

Specialty Vacancies

A national survey of children's hospitals found that specialists are in short supply. That means children and their families often have to wait for care or travel long distances for appropriate treatment.

Percentage of hospitals reporting vacancies, by specialty:

Neurology	62.8%
Developmental-behavioral pediatrics	41.9%
Endocrinology	41.9%
Pulmonology	39.5%
Gastroenterology	37.2%

Source: National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions

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But doctors in high demand and those who recruit them say the situation is far from ideal. They blame several factors: There are a limited number of pediatric residencies and fellowships, pediatric subspecialties require more training, and reimbursement for certain types of care is low.

Nick Lashutka, president of the Ohio Children's Hospital Association, would like more federal money for graduate medical education, and he'd like specialists who treat children on Medicaid to make the same kind of money as specialists who treat adult Medicare patients.

"You have to really like this practice. It's actually very low-paying," said Riley, the endocrinologist from Akron Children's Hospital.

"For diabetes, you're more of a counselor, a psychologist and a cheerleader."

Many experts would like to see more training slots open up throughout the country.

Although medical-class sizes have increased in recent years, there hasn't been an effort to increase the federal dollars that support residencies and fellowships at children's hospitals, said Dr. Norman Christopher, chairman of pediatrics in Akron. Nurse practitioners are helping fill gaps in care at many hospitals, he said.

In addition to taxing the specialists, shortages can mean that doctors who also are working on clinical trials must give up some of their research time, said Mike Farrell, president of University Hospitals Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital in Cleveland.

Both Farrell and Mahan said they'd like to see more efforts to help medical students repay loans. One example is a National Institutes of Health loan-repayment program that helps aspiring specialists.

For more information or to discuss candidates available for relocation in pediatric subspecialties please contact Sherriff & Associates.

Top 10 Reasons Candidates Enjoy Working with Recruiters

Over the years many candidates have called or sent us thank you notes expressing their appreciation for helping them find the perfect job. This top 10 list is a compilation of the reasons candidates have enjoyed working with our recruiters.

1. Recruiters are often available after normal business hours.

Candidates call, email and text 24/7. They appreciate being able to reach the recruiter or receiving a call back quickly. The generational difference between newly-graduated providers and more senior providers sometimes dictates how recruiters communicate with candidates. However, a quick response is always essential to ensure questions are answered and information is provided.

2. Recruiters assist candidates with CVs and resumés.

Recruiters read and evaluate CVs and resumes to get to know their candidates better. This process allows recruiters to work with candidates to correct typos, fill in time gaps, and ensure CVs and resumes are up-to-date and include current information. Confusing or questionable items are clarified and corrected before the candidate is presented to the job opportunity. Candidates recognize their CVs or resumés create a first impression and they appreciate our diligence to ensure their information is accurate.

3. Recruiters get to know candidates before discussing the job opportunity.

Many candidates express appreciation for the time invested by a recruiter to learn about their practice, community and geographic preferences before presenting job opportunities for consideration. Recruiters who "recruit for retention" understand the importance of presenting candidates who will likely stay long-term in the community.

4. Recruiters know the ins and outs of the practice opportunity and community.

Experienced recruiters often have long-term relationships with their clients and can provide candidates with excellent background information on the organization, community, and practice opportunity.

Candidates also appreciate receiving written descriptions of the opportunities and website addresses so they can access additional information.

5. Recruiters communicate regularly with candidates.

Candidates appreciate knowing when the recruiter has presented their CV for consideration and who will be calling them, being debriefed after telephone interviews and site visits, and when to expect a letter of intent or contract. Some candidates are unsure of the process of finding a practice opportunity in the beginning but are much more comfortable when working with a recruiter who communicates regularly.

6. Recruiters help candidates prepare for telephone interviews and site visits.

Recruiters often prepare candidates and clients alike with questions to ask during telephone interviews and site visits to help determine if the candidate and organization are a good match. Recruiters also ask candidates what they would like to see/do during site visits and convey that information to clients to ensure the time and resources invested will meet the needs of both parties.

7. Recruiters are honest with candidates.

Candidates appreciate accurate and true information about the job opportunity, community, compensation package, and earning potential. Some candidates' prior job search experiences prompt them to compliment the honesty they feel in working with our recruiters.

8. Recruiters will sometimes become an advocate for a great candidate.

There are times recruiters work with candidates who do not perfectly fit a client's ideal candidate specifications. Recruiters sometimes become an advocate for a great candidate who meets some of the client specifications and may bring additional skills or experience that would enhance a client's organization.

9. Recruiters assist with contract negotiations.

One of the most important roles of a recruiter is to communicate a candidate's contract questions and concerns to the client. Candidates often express the ease of discussing legal documents, compensation and benefit packages with the recruiter.

10. Recruiters in good standing with NAPR or NALTO are professional and ethical.

Some candidates prefer working with recruiters who are members in good standing of the National Association of Physician Recruiters (NAPR) or the National Association of Locum Tenens Organizations (NALTO) because these organizations have codes of ethics and professional standards of practice. Our membership provides candidates a level of confidence they are working with an ethical and professional search firm and recruiter.

For more information about our recruitment services, please contact us.

Compensation Corner

2009 Mean Compensation for Neonatology (based on 2008 data)

Overall: \$315,000

Academic

Assistant Professor: \$200,000

Associate Professor: \$220,000

Professor: \$245,000

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