A Strategy for Radiology Job Seekers

February 11, 2014
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Radiologists who are looking for a new job may have to adjust their approach and develop a strategy in the tightening job market.

Job searching can be an overwhelming experience — particularly in professions like medicine that are generally considered to have good prospects for new graduates. However, for new radiologists, there is an impression that jobs are becoming more difficult to come by.

Researchers from Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston looked into the issue, using the American College of Radiology (ACR) Jobs Board for the data. While their findings, published in the Journal of the American College of Radiology, showed that there were almost twice as many radiologist job seekers than jobs in the U.S., not all is as grim as may be thought. Diagnostic Imaging spoke with radiologist and corresponding study author, Anand Prabhakar, MD.

Why is this type of study important?
This topic dominates the thoughts of current radiology trainees, both residents and fellows. I think the discussion arises if not daily, then at least every other day in some shape or form.

Did you look into geographical differences regarding job availability?
Unfortunately, the actual job postings are not retained, so we couldn’t make that type of analysis. The same goes with the type of radiologist jobs posted. If we could, we would have been able to make that determination. It would be an interesting issue to look at in future studies.

What do you think is behind the higher number of job seekers compared with the number of available jobs?
I think it is a combination of three things. One: volume and reimbursement has been declining. There is also the fact that the economy, in the past several years, has been difficult. So, I think that this may have contributed to the lack of growth. Unemployment was high and many patients were without health insurance. And then, I believe the previously dismal economy has delayed some retirements. I believe this has also been well established in fields outside of medicine. Now that the stock market has reached an all-time high, perhaps some of those delayed retirements may actually come through. This may lead to a need for radiologists in the future.

So now that you have gathered this information, what should we do with it?
I think the conclusions in the study that are very important to utilize are that, number one: there were almost two new job applicants for one new job position. This basically confirms that based on the ACR Jobs board, there are more new job seekers than new jobs posted. So we have confirmed that there is a competitive environment for jobs with this data.

I think the most important conclusion in our study is most new job seekers start in the summer. The scarcity of jobs is exacerbated when there are an increased number of new job seekers. The data also showed was that there was the same number of new jobs posted throughout the year, including when there were fewer new job seekers. Thus, the strategy of being patient could help. If one does not find an ideal position or any position in the fall period, they could be reassured that there will be fewer new job applicants looking for the same number of new positions in the winter and spring.

So, other than not giving up the job hunt, what message would you like to tell radiologists who are trying to find work?
Anand Prabhakar, MD  

One is not to give up hope. I think that is a very powerful thing, and to hang in there. Two would be to try to devise a strategy. I think that trainees need a little bit of a strategy in job seeking to maximize their chances and probabilities of attaining a job that makes them happy.

I try to encourage the trainees at Mass General to imagine themselves in the shoes of the employer. The employers are trying to fill their scarce positions with the highest qualified applicants, so I think that applicants now really need to focus on what they bring to a practice and try to market themselves.

I think gone are the days where you simply apply and obtain a position. I think it’s about marketing and personal branding. We can all bring more value to a practice, but we may not have had to think about how we do that that way in the past. These concepts are thoroughly discussed for graduates of business school, but have not percolated to physician job seekers.

I think that if applicants spend some time thinking about and brainstorming what they bring to a practice, they may put themselves at an advantage compared to other applicants who don’t invest that time.

The third thing I would encourage applicants to do is to be flexible. The recent survey from the ACR Council of Human Resources published in *JACR* in October 2013 concluded that there is a job for every graduating radiologist, but it may not be the “ideal” job. It may not be in the location the job seekers want. It may also not be in the subspeciality of choice. That’s a very powerful statement because, to me, that shows that we actually have it pretty good, compared to most non-physicians who are in the job market.

So I encourage applicants to not only use my data, but also the data from the ACR human resources paper, which combined shows them that they should spend some time thinking about ways to be flexible. Try to brainstorm: “The job market won’t allow me to live in my first choice, but can I live in my third or fourth choice location?” So basically, if they’re flexible, I think they’ll also be more successful and satisfied in the job market.

Finally, in spite of this depressing job market, applicants should aim to seek a fulfilling career rather than simply a job, as their career will last at least 30 years. If one’s initial job choices aren’t ideal, try to think about how to best position yourself (an additional fellowship or an additional degree) for the future.

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