

Orthopaedic Surgeons

Recruiting and attracting in-demand surgical talent



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Rising demand for orthopaedic health services

An aging baby boomer population far more active than previous generations and an emphasis on daily exercise as preventative care are driving increased demand for orthopaedic services. The Centers for Disease Control estimates the number of knee replacements will soar from 700,000 in 2010 to 3.48 million by 2030, and total hip replacements will rise from 300,000 to 572,000. By 2026, there will be more than 7,600 new orthopaedic physician positions created, with an emphasis on total joint replacement/reconstruction and spine, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

To hire or not to hire?

Whether a medical group, hospital or health system, the decision to hire an orthopaedic surgeon has significant financial impact. For example, a hospital looking to expand surgical services may not break even on an annual physician investment of \$400,000 to \$600,000 for several years, until a referral base grows. On the other hand, a medical group facing high current demand for services must weigh the option of hiring an additional surgeon with having existing staff absorb the overflow. Each has implications on the bottom line and physician work life balance. Therefore, once a decision to make a hire is reached it's important to clearly identify hiring goals and performance expectations, and to develop an effective talent attraction strategy.

Enticing surgeons to accept a job offer: surgical residents vs. experienced surgeons

With plenty of job opportunities to choose from, how will your organization's orthopaedic position stand out from others? What are the most attractive elements to include in a hiring agreement? And, how might career motivations and preferences differ between newly graduated surgeons and those with more experience?

To gain further insight, Cejka Search conducted a survey of more than 200 orthopaedic surgical residents and compared the findings with their observations from decades of working with seasoned surgeons.

Lifestyle and work-life balance rising in importance

Physicians who choose orthopaedic surgery tend to be more entrepreneurial in nature. While compensation is a motivating factor, it is also assumed given the high level of demand and attractive pay rates typical of this specialty. As a result, orthopaedic surgeons have the luxury of choosing a job that meets their personal preferences, with geographic location and lifestyle rising in importance.

“Today, surgeons at all stages of their careers are placing a higher priority on lifestyle. Location influences their quality of life and recreational options, and perks like shortened call schedules and reserved OR blocks can help provide the work-life balance they are seeking.”

— Don Weis
Senior Vice President, Cejka Search

Younger generations more likely to consider untraditional career options

All generations prefer to practice in a suburban community, including 53 percent of residents. However, 31 percent of residents are also interested in metropolitan areas and 16 percent in rural communities. “Rural hospitals are offering increasingly competitive packages,” explained Cejka Search Vice President Diane Safner, “which can attract residents who want to maximize their earnings right out of the gate, and perhaps receive loan repayment assistance or other financial perks.”

Increased compensation is most effective to attract residents to locations that are less desirable, according to 77 percent of survey respondent. Anywhere from 40 percent to 46 percent of residents indicated that a higher production bonus, better call schedule or shorter work schedule would also make them consider taking a position in a less desirable location.

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Younger generations more likely to consider untraditional career options, cont'd.

Half of residents surveyed want to work at a single-specialty medical group. After which, they are equally likely to consider working at a hospital (34 percent) as they are a multi-specialty group (34 percent), and 20 percent would consider working for a health system or integrated delivery system. Hospital employment offers fellows a chance to practice without the administrative burdens of running a business and with less pressure to build a patient base. Hospitals have also increased salaries to compete for specialty surgeons in scarce supply. The trade-off for physicians is less autonomy and control.

The vast majority of experienced surgeons prefer a single-specialty medical group, with the exception of trauma sub-specialists due to complex reimbursements. “Single-specialty groups allow practicing surgeons to participate in downstream revenue opportunities that make up for recent salary caps,” said Ken Sammut, Cejka Search Vice President of Recruiting. “Equitable distribution of profits is also simpler to achieve at a single-specialty group than a multi-specialty group where overhead is often higher and reimbursement rates are more varied.”

Sammut also explained shorter time to partnership, once offered as a way to attract both experienced and newly trained surgeons, is now fairly standard at two years — forcing employers to offer more creative job perks. This includes attractive ancillary profit sharing agreements, tail coverage, support staff such as their own Physician Assistant and, in some cases, annual retention bonuses for the first several years of practice.

	SURGICAL ORTHOPAEDIC RESIDENTS	SEASONED SURGEONS
SALARY	Very important: Generally assumed, given the high rates documented nationwide by many wage surveys	Very important: expected as part of the offer.
MEDICAL GROUP VS. HOSPITAL	While single-specialty groups (50 percent) are attractive practice settings, hospitals (34 percent) and multi-specialty groups (34 percent) were equally appealing. About 20 percent of those surveyed would also consider working at a health system or integrated delivery system.	Single-specialty group is by far the preference. Opportunities to participate in group profit-sharing and ancillary services are optimally appealing. Multi-specialty groups are somewhat less attractive. Experience has demonstrated that procedural differences between specialties makes equitable profit sharing among partners more complex.
COMMUNITY TYPE	While suburban (53 percent) and metropolitan (31 percent) locations are preferred, a fair portion of residents would consider a rural location (16 percent), where they can optimize their income and possibly even receive loan assistance and other financial perks.	Notwithstanding personal or family ties to a rural community, the majority prefer a suburban practice location with nearby access to a larger city for the amenities.
FINANCIAL INCENTIVES	Production incentives (69 percent) appealed the highest proportion of residents, followed by call pay (56 percent) and time to partnership (51 percent). Interestingly, call pay once offered as an extra perk is becoming fairly standard in any competitive market today.	With recent federal caps on physician salaries, partnership profit sharing and downstream revenues from ancillary services have become primary financial incentives.
QUALITY OF LIFE	Growing importance: Location/lifestyle is the top consideration in accepting a position among residents (40 percent). It is equally important to those with and without young children, as the pursuit of interests outside of work becomes more prevalent.	Growing importance: Location/lifestyle is becoming more important to seasoned physicians, as they look for amenities that meet their personal interests, such as golf, sailing, dining, theatre, etc.
RETENTION BONUSES	Paid out over several years to support retention, sign-on bonuses, previously a competitive distinction, are today becoming standard in order to secure talent in small supply.	Retention bonuses are being offered for experienced doctors, ranging from \$25,000 in the Northeast to as much as \$75,000 in rural areas, more commonly in the form of several-year forgivable loans or multi-year earn-outs.

Source: 2018 Cejka Search Survey of Orthopaedic Surgical Residents

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The key to attracting top orthopaedic surgeons: create a red-carpet candidate experience

AAOS shows an estimated two to three career changes will be made by orthopaedic surgeons over the course of their careers with about 50 percent making a change during the first two years in practice. Creating a long-term employment relationship starts with hiring the right talent, and today's competitive recruitment market requires that your job offer stands out from others.

Be sure to leverage on-site candidate visits and create an impactful "red-carpet" experience, before, during and after the visit.

- 1. Gain internal consensus and clarity.** Having internal agreement among stakeholders about the primary goals and expectations of a surgical position will allow you to better screen, interview and align expectations with a new hire. For example, are you seeking to fill a position of a retiring surgeon? Are you looking to add a fellowship-trained sub-specialist not already represented in the group? Are you looking for a surgeon who is expected to build a new patient base?
- 2. Make a memorable first impression.** Arrange transportation from the airport, and have a knowledgeable representative greet and guide the candidate for the day.
- 3. Learn the candidate's needs and interests in advance.** Data shows that candidates are more likely to accept positions that are close to family, where they have personal ties, or in a community that fits their lifestyle. Customize the visit experience by gathering information about the candidate's personal expectations in advance.
- 4. Include time with peers.** Candidates often find that their most valuable insight into a potential employer or position comes through time spent with peers. Carve out time for peer discussion, ideally among those who share similar backgrounds or experiences.
- 5. Communicate the goals and topics of the interview.** Take care to brief all interviewers on the candidate's profile, background and interests. Clarify any further information to be gathered from the candidate by each interviewer and communicate the visit agenda in advance.
- 6. Provide prompt, clear follow-up.** Assign a representative to follow through on any additional phone interviews or provide information that was requested during the visit.



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STATES MOST AND LEAST PREFERRED AS PRACTICE LOCATIONS			
MOST PREFERRED		LEAST PREFERRED	
CALIFORNIA	26.74%	NEBRASKA	1.16%
FLORIDA	20.93%	SOUTH DAKOTA	1.16%
TEXAS	19.77%	ARKANSAS	2.60%
NORTH CAROLINA	16.28%	DELAWARE	2.46%
COLORADO	15.70%	IOWA	2.39%
WASHINGTON	15.70%	MISSISSIPPI	2.39%
OREGON	14.53%	RHODE ISLAND	2.91%
NEW YORK	13.95%	NEVADA	3.49%
VIRGINIA	13.37%	WEST VIRGINIA	3.49%
ARIZONA	12.79%		
GEORGIA	12.79%		
MASSACHUSETTS	11.05%		
PENNSYLVANIA	11.05%		
SOUTH CAROLINA	11.05%		
MONTANA	10.47%		

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics; 2018 Cejka Orthopaedic Surgical Resident Survey; U.S. News & World Report Becker Hospital Review, 2018; American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, 2016 OPUS/Census Survey AAOS Orthopaedic Practice in the U.S. 2004-2005

About Cejka Search

Cejka Search is a nationally recognized physician, healthcare executive, and advanced practice search firm providing services exclusively to the healthcare industry for more than 35 years. Cejka Search recruits top healthcare talent for organizations nationwide through our team of experienced professionals, award-winning recruitment technology and commitment to service excellence. Cejka Search is a Cross Country Healthcare, Inc. (Nasdaq: CCRN) company, a leading provider of healthcare staffing services in the United States. For more information, visit cejkasearch.com.