

INTERVIEWS

Just what the doctor ordered

The innocent's guide to the interview, by Dr Jon Garvey.



ON THE face of it, applying for a job in general practice is fairly straightforward. In contrast to a hospital application, you are not required to complete a form with two lines for your past career, qualifications and interests, and three pages of space for publications, decorations and university chancellorships.

No, theoretically you should get the job if you are the best-qualified applicant with the pleasantest personality. This, of course, is never the case, as choosing from 90-100 applicants bears more resemblance to doing the pools than making rational judgments. However, like Gideon choosing his army, there are patterns followed by those who advertise, the understanding of which is essential to success. I pass on my considerable experience for your benefit in these notes.

'Old school tie' phenomenon.

The senior partner spots that he went to the same kindergarten as you, but 20 years earlier. This gets you an interview, which seems odd to me, as all the medics at my college were either stupid or unpleasant. I myself was in both categories. In reality the poor chap is Seeking a Sign, like Gideon with his fleece.

'Just testing' technique. For every invitation to interview there are three letters explaining that the post has already been filled. In fact it was allocated to one of the partners' brothers three months before, but was advertised anyway in case Hippocrates, or someone, applied. Always reply thanking them for their consideration, and mention that if any further vacancies arise in their practice you wouldn't touch them with a disposable proctoscope.

Happy families. 'Why don't you bring your family along?' they ask politely. They really want to check that your wife isn't a wino. In my case, the interview was conducted, very sensibly I

thought at first, over tea and scones on the senior partner's patio.

The babies mewled and puked all afternoon, and the two-year-old, pied-piper fashion, led all the other, much older, children down the garden into a quagmire. 'Now Doctor Garvey,' said our host, 'and what sort of practice are you looking for?'

'Well, my main concern is... *Martyn come away from that swimming pool* — excuse me a interview was conducted, very moment...'

Does the face fit? This ought to be a foolproof selection procedure, since the interviewers simply agree on whether the candidate seems at home in their set-up. In fact, success in the game is inversely proportional to the distance travelled. After seven or eight hours driving, one's face barely fits oneself, let alone somebody else's group practice.

Winner takes all. An interesting ploy, this, in which applicants are set in direct competition with each other. I encountered it in the wilds of Worcestershire, where, following an interview in a hot-dog kiosk with the practice manager, who turned out to be the two partners under a pseudonym, I was treated to lunch with them and another applicant, who was, of course, a Doppel-gänger of Christian Barnard.

'I've just been doing some research into the relative incidence of Balkan Nephropathy on the Cotswolds and in the Vale of Evesham, with my father's practice,' he remarked conversationally. Well, what does one say?

'I had a nice holiday in the Cotswolds once...'

'Morning after the night before' Syndrome. Beware this one. It is caused by having long-

lost relatives or friends *en route* to the interview. In my case, I stopped overnight with my brother near Stratford-upon-Avon on my way to Gloucester. He turned out to have very hospitable neighbours, devotees of the Maharajah Bagwash, or it may have been his mother, who treated us to a vegetarian gourmet supper followed by a fascinating metaphysical conversation until 3am.

Despite backing the car into a lamp-post, I felt the interview would go well, as I noticed a bookcase full of the complete works of E. E. 'Doc' Smith and Isaac Asimov discreetly hidden behind a sofa when I arrived at the interviewer's house.

A man after my own heart, thought I. However, when it came to it, my lack of sleep, and perhaps the transcendental evening's entertainment, made me unable to think of anything except a persistent internal voice which kept repeating, absurdly, 'Doctor Flouchester went to Gloucester' over and over again.

In the end, actually getting a job is ridiculously easy. You arrive, have a pleasant chat about winemaking or Neolithic Man, and are asked when you can start.

What of the psychological gambits? The complex selection techniques? I fear I know the answer. When the cards are down, there is one overwhelming priority, The Ultimate Selector. It is called 'We've got to have someone.'

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