



EPISODE 66 Do You Need Experience to Land a Nonclinical Job?

With Dr. Heather Fork

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HF: “If you were a hundred percent match for this job, like you could do all the things they were talking about and you had all the qualifications, you're really ready for the higher-level position that comes next, or to do something different.”

Welcome to The Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. If you're questioning your career in medicine, you've come to the right place. I'm Heather Fork, a former dermatologist and founder of The Doctor's Crossing. As a master certified coach, I've helped hundreds of physicians find greater happiness in their career, whether in medicine, a nonclinical job, or something else. I started this podcast to help you discover the career path that's best for you and give you some resources and encouragement to make it happen. You don't need to get stuck at the white coat crossroads. So, pull up a chair, my friend, and let's carpe that diem.

Hello, hello and welcome back to the Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. You are listening to episode number 66. Today I'm flying solo to address one of the most common questions that comes up around career change. And it just happened to come up on one of my coaching calls yesterday.

I was speaking with a pediatrician for the first time and she was considering these different nonclinical options, but she said “How would I get a job? When I look at these

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job descriptions, they want you to have this experience. How do I get a job if I have to have experience, but I can't get experience without having a job?"

This catch 22 situation is exactly the conundrum we're going to be diving into. We'll be looking at the reality of this situation, as well as how to understand job descriptions and be strategic in the ones you apply for.

There's going to be a second part to this topic in next week's podcast, where we'll be looking at concrete ways you can be an even more desirable candidate regardless of your nonclinical experience level. I'm going to talk about the situation here in this episode, and then we'll be following up with things that you can do to add to your ability to get hired with no prior experience.

I want to just give you the punchline though, so you can relax and absorb this information. And the punchline is yes, you can absolutely get nonclinical jobs without having this prior experience that you see in certain job descriptions. And I'll be explaining that, but I have proof and so many clients that I've worked with from many different specialties who went into a whole variety of nonclinical jobs without prior experience.

All right, let's get to it. I'd like to start by comparing the clinical job description to the nonclinical ones. When you look at a clinical job description, you meet all the qualifications and you also understand what the duties and responsibilities are. You also aren't expecting that your employer is going to train you to do this job. You know what it is, they know you have the skills and it's a nice one-to-one match.

For example, if you're a general surgeon and you get a job, they're not expecting to teach you how to do an appendectomy. That's a given. Whereas in a nonclinical position, when you look at the duties and responsibilities in that description, they can often look



like Greek and you may not even know, like, “What are they talking about?” And perhaps when you look at the preferred qualifications, you don't even have them.

So, these job descriptions are often aspirational, meaning that the company isn't necessarily expecting to find a physician who's a one-to-one match with this job. This is their wish list, but they're often more than happy to find a candidate who meets maybe 50% of what they have in there. Especially if there's a lot of preferred skills or experience. Those aren't required, they're aspirational.

And for many of these nonclinical positions, especially when you come in at the entry level, they are expecting to train you. They often will tell you when they hire you “You're not going to know what you're doing for the first six months, or even in the first year, this is going to be a lot of learning and onboarding. And so, it's okay that you don't really understand the job.” As long as you meet the minimum qualifications that they're looking for, you're often a great fit for them.

The first thing to understand is that it's going to be difficult for you to only be a partial match for the job description. If you were a hundred percent match for this job, like you could do all the things they were talking about and you had all the qualifications, you're really ready for the higher-level position that comes next, or to do something different. Understand that it's actually a fine thing to not be a great match, even for the job itself.

However, you do want to apply for a position if this is your first one, for one that's more entry level versus a higher level position in that industry or area. How do you know when you look at a job description, whether it's more of an entry level position or an advanced one? There are a number of different ways to tell. And one obviously is the title itself. It might say Senior VP or Associate Medical Director, or simply Medical Director. So, you can get some inference from the title.



The progression typically, though, there are some exceptions, would be Associate Medical Director being more entry level. And then after that, they would advance to a Medical Director, then Senior Medical Director, VP, CMO, et cetera. So, that can give you some guidance.

Another thing that I like to do is to go to the job description and immediately scroll down to where they talk about the required qualifications. There's different language that they use that might say minimum qualifications, required skills, required experience, required education, but you're looking for this distinction between what's required and what's preferred.

In general, you'd like to meet the minimum qualification. Sometimes there's wiggle room in there. There are some caveats to that, but in general, that would be something to meet. And if you see a minimum qualification of five years of pharma experience, and you don't have any, this job is probably too much of a stretch for you right now.

However, if it says two years of industry experience, that sometimes is negotiable. They may waive that if they really like you as a candidate and you meet the other things that they're looking for. In general, this is not a hard, fast rule, but I like to say if they're looking for two years or less, typically, that is something that can be overridden potentially. If it's five years, seven years, eight years, that's usually too much of a stretch to get hired. That would be for someone who's already been in a position in this type of industry or this company, and this is more of an advanced job.

Another thing to look at are the job duties and responsibilities. And when you look at them, if you think, "Hmm, with some training and onboarding, these seem like things that I could grow into or pick up, they seem reasonable." You may not understand exactly what you'd be doing, but the general skillset underneath them, such as analyzing data or researching guidelines, communicating to stakeholders, these kinds of things,



like things that you can definitely learn. If that seems like a reasonable skill set, then it could be a go for you.

If you read, on the other hand, the job description and it is high level, you're managing people, you might be leading teams, doing things that presume already a pretty deep knowledge base in that area. This is probably not the starter job, if that's what you're looking for.

The next place that you can look are the preferred qualifications. They'll often mention some experience that's preferred. It might be that they want one or two years as a medical writer or two years in health insurance or utilization management work. When it's preferred, it's not required. So, there's definitely room here for a new physician to come into without prior experience.

This can also be a way to get some guidance on what might be some additional training or experience to add to your platform if you want to transition in a period of time where you could enhance your portfolio by getting this experience while you're still working. So, this can give you some clues about what you can do in the meantime, to make yourself a better candidate for applying. I'm going to be talking more about these ways of enhancing your candidacy in the next episode.

I wanted to just shift gears for a minute to look at things from the company's perspective. This can also influence whether you can get hired with less experience versus more experience. For example, there might be company A and they are a bigger company and they have more resources and employees to train and onboard new hires. In this situation, they can take on a physician who needed a lot of time to learn this job. And they're able to provide that.

There could be a company B that has a product they're launching, or they're a smaller company. They have less staff available for onboarding and mentoring and coaching. And



they're really looking for a candidate that gets this position and can hit the decks running.

You may not know this when you apply what the situation is, but it can be one reason why one job application may not work out. And you're still the same person with the same experience, and another company is ready to hire you.

Some companies also will put that they're looking for a certain specialty or state licensure on the job description, but don't let that deter you if you're not a match for that, because sometimes they have other positions where they're looking for a different specialty, or they may be able to consider you for a little bit down the road.

If you are a pretty good match, in other ways, I wouldn't rule out applying. Sometimes what I've seen happen is a physician will apply for a particular job. And they say "This isn't really the best position for you, but we have something else." And then they get to apply for another job and that ends up being a great fit.

Now I'd like to talk a little bit more about how to be strategic when you're applying for a job. We talked already about looking at the job, looking at the qualifications, trying to see if you are a reasonable match for this position.

Other things you can do, as I've talked about before on another podcast, is to customize your resume for this job. This makes a huge difference because when you take your basic CV and you customize it for this role, by looking at the duties and responsibilities on the job description, you help make that case for the recruiter as to why you're a great candidate for this position. You've done the heavy lifting for them. They don't have to burn a bunch of calories to see, "Why would this physician even want this job and what are their qualifications?"



That's one thing you can do is convert your CV to a customized resume. You can also customize your LinkedIn profile or have a basic one, make sure that you have a LinkedIn profile when you're applying to jobs so that the recruiter can learn more about you and see your photograph and have additional information.

I have resources for converting your resume as well as a course on using LinkedIn. You can find these, if you're interested, by going to my website at doctorscrossing.com and at the top of the page there is the products tab. If you click on the products tab, you'll be able to get more information about these two resources for you.

To wrap things up here, I just wanted to reiterate that I have seen many, many physicians get hired in a wide variety of nonclinical positions without prior experience. You do want to be strategic, as we talked about here. And in the next episode number 67, I'm going to be talking about some of the different things that my clients have done to enhance their platform for getting hired.

There's a double benefit to doing some of these things. They help you learn more about this potential area and see whether it might be something you really want to do. And of course, they enhance what you bring to the table as a candidate, and are also things that you can often put on your resume and put on your LinkedIn profile.

I hope this episode has been encouraging for you because I want to make this whole process less overwhelming, definitely doable. And of course, fun too. So, make sure to check out the next episode, I'll see you there. And in the meantime, don't forget to carpe that diem. Bye for now.

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