



EPISODE 154 Top Reasons Why You May Not Be Getting Nonclinical Job Interviews - Part 1

With Dr. Heather Fork

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HF: “If you're having more trouble this year, there definitely are economic reasons, but the truth is people are still getting hired, the economy is still going along and the pendulum swings.”

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.

Hi there and welcome back to the Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. I'm your host Heather Fork, and you're listening to episode number 154. Today I'm doing the first part of a two-part series on the top reasons why you may not be getting nonclinical job interviews. Next week I'll follow up with part two as a continuation of this topic.

I know how frustrating it can be to take precious time that you don't really have to apply for jobs only to hear crickets. I see posts in some physician Facebook groups where the

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physician has applied to hundreds of jobs, even up to a thousand with no success. This, of course, can be very challenging and it's important to figure out what is not working. As doctors are so used to applying for nonclinical jobs and getting interviews and often being solicited, sometimes even hounded to apply, it's no wonder we can easily get discouraged when we are ignored, ghosted, or rejected faster than a team rushing to a code.

Silence can be deafening and the sting of rejection can endure and be demotivating and demoralizing. We can't demand an interview and push our way through the door that stands between us and opportunity, but we can take a number of key steps to give ourselves the best chance possible to get that interview.

Today and next week I'll be discussing a variety of factors, some of which are out of our control, and others that we can do something about that affect the likelihood of our being offered an interview. In addition, I'll be sharing proactive steps you can take to increase your odds of having a recruiter reach out.

To get us started, I want to give some examples from my coaching experience of clients applying to nonclinical jobs. What I wanted to talk about is a group of clients that I had who were all applying to the pharmaceutical industry around the same time. There were two oncologists, two OB-GYN physicians and one anesthesiologist.

As you would expect, it was easier for the oncologist to find jobs. One of the oncologists actually had specific research experience that this pharmaceutical company was looking for. All she had to do was talk to the hiring manager and she was basically offered the job.

The other oncologist did not really have much research experience. He was a relatively new attending and he did have to apply for some jobs, but again, it didn't take a whole



lot of time or a large number of applications for him to be granted interviews and then offered a position.

These are examples of how the specialty can make a big difference when you're applying. You might be a fantastic person, you might have great experience, but it just may be that the company is looking for a different specialty.

I'll be talking more in a bit about how your background and experience obviously make a huge difference and also the way we present our background. But in the case of the oncologist throughout the research experience, that was a slam dunk and if you don't have that, there's no way to write your resume or finagle the keywords that you use to show that it's just not there and that's not anything personal against you, it's just a fact.

In the case of the two OB-GYN physicians, neither of them had any prior pharmaceutical experience. As you could imagine, it was a different story. One OB-GYN physician was still in practice as an OB-GYN and she started applying to pharma jobs, but she wasn't hearing anything back.

She started doing things to increase her platform to get into pharma and time passed and she was really thinking that nothing was going to work, but she kept persisting and doing things. She wasn't giving up and then she heard from a company that she had applied to months ago, she had given up on them, but they reached out. She ended up interviewing and she got the job. They were looking for an OB-GYN physician, so that was a good specialty match and they were willing to train somebody new.

In the case of the other OB-GYN physician, she was more seasoned in terms of having a lot more clinical practice than the other one. However, it had been a while since she had been doing OB-GYN work. She had done a number of different things, some in clinical practice and other things that were unrelated, and so she had a very eclectic resume.



Great person, great personality, super smart, but she was also for a while not experiencing any success. Then she got an interview with a company that was looking for an OB-GYN physician and she went all the way to the end of the interviews. It looked like she could even get this job, but then they ended up going with a different candidate.

She was very discouraged and while she was waiting to hear back from this pharma company, she had applied on a LARC to a utilization management job thinking, "I don't even really want this. It's just grasping." And then she ended up getting an interview with this company, loved the company, ended up saying yes to the job and is so happy there. She feels like this is where she wants to retire.

This is something I want to point out, sometimes when you're heading in a certain direction, it's not working out, it may be that you should just persist and continue and then that interview and the job offer are going to be just around the corner. You just need to hang on.

But then sometimes it's really a message from the universe to pivot, to reconsider, to maybe look at a different door. And it's really individual. It really takes some discernment to figure out when you're not having success, which direction to go in.

Now in the case of the anesthesiologist, he was a relatively new attending and he did not have any pharma experience and he applied to a lot of jobs and he wasn't really getting very many interviews. He did a lot of networking to try to increase his odds. He was doing all the right things, but he just wasn't having much success.

However, he didn't give up and I think when he was close to giving up, he got an interview and this was for a job that was going to require him to relocate to another state. And that was a big deal. It wasn't really something he was planning on, but he ended up taking the job and moving in order to have this position, and that's worked out well too.



As you can see, there's a lot of complexity to this picture, but I'm going to dive into some of the specific factors and talk about them one at a time. Let's begin with economic conditions. This is something so out of your control, you can't just turn a knob and turn the economy on if we're in a recession.

I will definitely say that in this past year I feel like we've been seeing the effects of inflation and slowing down of the economy. A lot of my former clients who have transitioned into nonclinical companies say they're having hiring freezes and even layoffs.

If you're having more trouble this year, there definitely are economic reasons, but the truth is people are still getting hired, the economy is still going along and the pendulum swings. We've seen how even physician jobs in the clinical realm have been affected with all the layoffs that happened during COVID and what we once thought was a very secure profession has now been really affected a lot more by the whims of the economy and also the whims of corporate companies and their policies and practices regarding employment of physicians.

The next factor that I wanted to mention is the timing of your application. And this has two different ways we can look at it. One is, when you're applying, how much time has passed since that job was posted? For example, if you catch the job when it's just recently posted, you're going to come in before there's a whole bunch of resumes that the recruiter has to look at. If when you're applying, you see that this job has been open for over a month and there might be 75 or more applicants, it's possible that when you apply, they even have a short list of who they're interested in or even a top candidate.

It's helpful, once you know the job titles that you're applying for, to put alerts. You can do this on LinkedIn, you can do it on Indeed and other platforms that tell you one job with a similar title has been posted and then you can be one of the first to apply.



Another aspect of timing has to do with a hiring cycle for the year for the company. As you would imagine, during the holidays, December, end of November, December, beginning of January, these tend to be slow times for companies and there are certain times of year when they get their budgets for hiring and then they increase their activity. For example, usually in January, February, companies start looking at their budgets for the new year and figuring out their hiring needs. And so, February and March can be busy hiring times. This time of year right now, September, October tend to be busy hiring times, summer can slow down.

But given that there can also be obviously times when people turn in their resignation and that wasn't expected or a number of people retire or perhaps it's a pharma company and you just got approval for a new drug. So they're going to be actively hiring more candidates and that could be any time of year.

If you have connections with a recruiter at a company, you can even ask them when do you tend to hire more than others, and try to match this with when you submit your application or look for job postings.

The next factor I wanted to look at is the overall level of competition. I'll often hear physicians saying, "Oh, it used to be much easier to get into utilization management or get into pharma, or there were a lot more jobs for life insurance medical directors in the past."

Because in the past there weren't that many physicians looking into nonclinical careers and wanting to leave medicine. I know I never heard about it when I was in training or in practice. There are a lot more physicians applying for these positions than there used to be. Does that mean you should hurry up and apply even if you weren't thinking of leaving now? In case the worry is that there's going to be even more competition in two years or five years, you might as well try now.



I really would not suggest that. I think these major areas, these major nonclinical sectors are not going away. Obviously they're changing over time. Medical writing is changing some degree to artificial intelligence, but we will always need physician medical writers.

There are also new areas that will continue to open up and expand, for example, in artificial intelligence and data analytics and informatics and things that we don't even know about right now.

What does this mean for you? I would say do what you need to do. If you want to leave now, start looking and making yourself as competitive as possible, and that would be to talk to people in the jobs that you're interested in going into and ask them based on what my CV or resume looks like now, are there things I can do over the next couple months, the next six months and next year to be a more competitive applicant?

Because then you're getting specific advice from the individuals who know exactly what you need versus guessing. You might say, "Oh, I should get an MBA or I should take this expensive course or I should get on all these committees." Any one of those things could potentially be useful, but if you're strategic, you'll find out from people really in the know what would be the specific recommendations for you.

The next thing I want to mention is your specialty. I talked about that a little bit before, but this obviously can be a big factor and it's something that you're not really going to change unless you want to do another residency.

It's very helpful when you're looking at job descriptions to read the required qualifications because sometimes they mention specific specialties and other times they give a number of specialties and then other times it's left completely open. Obviously the better match you are for that job and what they're looking for, the higher your chances. That's just a given and it can make a huge difference.



So, if you're applying for a job and you're not in that specialty, don't take it personally if your resume isn't accepted. That could be the primary reason. Here's a caveat, however, that some job postings will list specialties, but then they use the same job description. Like say they'll put a job description up and it says for a cardiologist, and the truth is they actually accept other specialties, they just happen to keep using this job posting.

I know that can be a little bit confusing. "Well, should I apply, should I not?" By reading the job description and understanding about the company and who they actually hire and talking to people within the company too, you can get an idea of whether they are actually hiring different specialties.

I know this for a fact because I talk to recruiters and I have them send me a list often of who are you looking for? And then when I go on LinkedIn or Indeed and look at the job description, it's usually not listing anywhere near that number of specialties. Don't automatically rule out a job for yourself if you don't see it in the job posting, but just try to find out more information.

The next factor I want to look at is how well your experience and background match the job. And this is where we really drill into the job description. Even if you're not applying at this time, but you know you want to, a good thing you can do is go on your favorite platform. I like LinkedIn, I like Indeed if you're looking for a government job, it might be usajobs.gov or another platform and print off a number of job descriptions for that job title.

And as you look at the requirements, those competencies they're looking at, the skills that you would be using in your duties in the job, you really start getting an idea of what kind of experience you would need to do this job and also what the required qualifications are.



Now here's the thing. We often do this and we get really discouraged because we are a direct match for our clinical jobs. Our skills training and experience when we apply, say as an ER physician to work in the ER, one-to-one match.

Now in the nonclinical realm, it's not going to be that. One reason is that when you're applying for a job, if you already have everything that they're looking for in that job, you are overqualified really, you should be going to a higher level position. It takes some getting used to reading these job posts to understand given where you're at and what your knowledge is, could this be a job that you could train into or is this a job that's a step above where you would enter into this industry or a couple steps above?

And this is where, again, I know I keep saying this, but it's really helpful to have someone who's actually doing this job or has done it or is in this sector to look at your CV and your resume and help give you some guidance about the transferable skills that you do have and whether this is one of those positions where they can train you and onboard you.

Sometimes when looking at a job description, it's hard to tell initially whether this is something that's too high level for you. But in general, what I've seen in nonclinical jobs when they say they prefer one to two years of industry experience, whatever industry that is, that can often be an entry-level job for you, something that you could actually get in without prior experience and be trained on the job. If the job description says three to five years industry experience required or even preferred, that's usually too much of a stretch for an entry-level position.

The next part of this is how well do you capture your experience and background for that job on your professional document that you submit. This is going on to the next factor, which is whether or not you've customized your CV, a resume for the job.

I talk a lot about this on the podcast and I did a recent episode, it was number 145, about five ways your resume can help you get a nonclinical job. If you haven't listened to

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that podcast that talks a lot in detail about how you can customize your professional document, typically your resume, to apply for nonclinical jobs.

I'm not going to go into a bunch of details here, but I did want to emphasize the fact that if we're applying to nonclinical jobs and using our CV, yes, sometimes that can work, especially if you're already a really good match for the job. Let's say you're an oncologist and your CV shows all this research that you've done and you're the specialty that they want. Yeah, send your CV. That'll often work. But it never, ever hurts to customize your resume.

And I often, when I customize resumes, we have everything you have on your CV, unless your CV is really long or there's a lot of information that's not pertinent, but a lot of that information is going to go right onto the resume, but it's how we put it on, where we put it in the resume, how we prioritize the information.

Another important part of the resume is that we write these bullet points in your professional experience area that help describe transferable skills specific for that job description. And again, I'm not going to go into the details of how to do that, but it's definitely something you can do and you'll be surprised at the transferable skills that you do have when you start converting your CV to a resume.

To give you the bottom line here, the goal is that when your resume gets in front of the recruiter in seven seconds or less, because that's what they say they usually spend in terms of time scanning the document. In seven seconds or less, they want to be able to tell if you are qualified for this job and they want to speak with you.

And there are definitely ways we can do that, but it takes a little bit of work. We don't want them to have to burn a lot of calories to figure out whether you're the right fit or not, because if it's a 25 page CV and it's late at night and they're tired and their eyes are



blurry, they're not going to want to wade through that to try to connect the dots and figure out whether they should call you.

This brings us to the next factor, which is the applicant tracking system. And the applicant tracking system can kick out your resume or CV before it ever gets to a human being. If you're not familiar with the ATS, it's a software that is looking for keywords on your documents, whether it's your resume, your application, your cover letter to see if you're a good match for this job.

Some companies use it, especially Google, Apple, big companies that are screening hundreds if not thousands of applications. Luckily as physicians, it's less likely that we're going to be screened by an ATS system, but still, when you apply, you're not sure, you don't know. So how do we make sure the ATS doesn't kick us out into a black hole? This is where you want to look at the job description, have an understanding of what they're really looking for and the qualifications in this job and make sure that your resume has those keywords on it and you have the qualifications that they're looking for.

There are some software programs you can use including Chat GPT, the artificial intelligence site that I mentioned in a recent podcast, where you can put in your resume and then you can put in the job description and it will tell you how well you're a match and often mention keywords that you are missing on your resume.

The last factor that I want to mention for this episode is how well you're using your network. As the saying goes, it's not what you know but who you know. This is so true in applying for jobs. They say that around 80% of jobs go to individuals who had a connection inside the company. That's a significant statistic and I've seen this play out with my own clients. It makes such a difference when they have an internal connection in that company, someone who can help get their resume to the hiring manager.

Companies have found that employees who refer other candidates refer good people who tend to stay. Hiring is expensive, it's risky. It's really difficult when people leave after a short period of time, so they're going to try to reduce the risk. It's one reason why companies often give significant bonuses to employees who refer a candidate that ends up staying.

It can be \$1,000, it can be \$5,000. I've even heard of \$10,000. You might be thinking, "Well, I don't know anybody in any of these companies." Well, don't worry. So many of my clients didn't know anybody either. But through networking on LinkedIn, reaching out to people in their alumni network, reaching out to recruiters, interacting in Facebook groups, all these different ways, they found people who can connect them with an insider.

On the podcast episode I did with Dr. Stacie Laff, we were talking about the story of how we found someone on LinkedIn who was a medical director in the kind of company she was interested in being hired in and she hadn't before had much luck on networking and hadn't been a real long, but she was getting discouraged and we found this doctor and she didn't know him. She reached out to him and he actually responded the next day. They had a lovely chat, they knew people in common and she ended up getting hired at the company. I see this happening over and over.

Don't worry if you're introverted, you haven't been super social, you're not used to networking, it feels uncomfortable. I've seen the shyest most introverted people who felt like they didn't know anybody make these kinds of connections.

In a little bit, I'm going to be doing an podcast episode talking about how to interact in Facebook groups, which can be really helpful for finding opportunities, getting help from other physicians when you're struggling and making connections of people who know about jobs or any companies that can help you get your foot in the door.



To wrap up this episode, I wanted to let you know about some resources that I have that can help you when you are applying for jobs. As I've mentioned on the podcast, I have my Carpe Diem resume kit. This is a kit which consists of a number of different resume templates and cover letter templates with instructional videos that help you convert your CV to a resume.

I have examples of what a resume looks like when a physician is just starting out and interested in applying and then also how the resume changes when they do a number of different things and then they can enhance that resume.

Another resource I have is my LinkedIn for Physicians course. This course consists of three hours of short video instructions which walk you step by step through creating your LinkedIn profile and optimizing it, and then there are lessons on how to reach out to recruiters, how to network. I have scripted messages and emails that you can write and customize. I walk you through also how to search for and apply to jobs. That's the LinkedIn for Physicians course.

You can find out more about the resume kit and the LinkedIn course by going to doctorscrossing.com. Go to the top of the page and hit the products tab and you can learn more about both of these. I'll also put links in the show notes for these two to make it easier for you.

All right, my dear listeners, thank you so much for being here. If you're struggling yourself and feeling discouraged, just know that there's a lot of help out there and things that you can do. Don't forget to carpe that diem and I'll see you in the next episode. Bye for now.

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Podcast details

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