**EPISODE 195 Are There Nonclinical Options For Older Physicians?**

**With Heather Fork, MD**

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HF: “If a company is looking for someone with that deep clinical knowledge, who still wants to work for a number of years, and you're in your 50s and your 60s, and we see maybe even older, and you're willing to learn, receive feedback, adapt to change, and get along with others, there are opportunities out there.”

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.

Hey 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 195. A while back, I had an initial consult with a physician, and we were on Zoom, and he wanted to show me his LinkedIn profile. When I looked at it, he didn't have a photo of himself, and I was really surprised. I said, “How come you don't have your photo? And he said, “Well, I want to apply for some nonclinical jobs, and I'm afraid the recruiters will think I am too old.” And I was literally shocked because he was 50. He had some salt and hair. It looked really good. And I see a lot of physicians get hired in their 50s, and there are also jobs for physicians in their 60s, and even in their 70s.

He was making an assumption that A) wasn't true, and doing something as a result, not having his photo, which was actually hurting him because not having a photo on your LinkedIn is a big no-no.

I tell this story to introduce the topic of this podcast, which is about ageism and potential opportunities for physicians who are in their later career stage. That could be in your 50s, 60s, even 70s.

This peri-retirement period, this later career stage area, is a big topic, and people have been asking me to do a podcast on the physician looking into retirement and slowing down. And I realized that I can't do this in just one episode, so I'm going to do four of them. There will be one on financial planning for retirement, another one on different career options for the older physician who's not ready to leave yet.

There will also be a podcast on topics around creating your vision for retirement, addressing issues such as identity, purpose, your legacy, health considerations, and more. And then, of course, this episode today, where we're looking at the question of ageism. These other episodes will be coming out over the next couple months, so stay tuned for those.

I would just also add, too, that a lot of you out there are youngsters or not really thinking about retirement, but these episodes could be helpful to, in a sense, think about your future, think about preparing, because the more you plan and have some idea of what you want these later years to be like, the easier it is to make the changes when you have a long runway in front of you.

All right, let's dive in. For today's episode, I reached out to five different individuals I know who have an insider's perspective on the situation of older physicians working in various nonclinical sectors. For some, I share their identity, and for others, I did not for privacy reasons.

This first individual is a very experienced pharma recruiter who has worked extensively in-house for a large pharma company and also has worked for a high-level executive recruiting agency, as an external recruiter. She said it's not uncommon for physicians in their 50s to be hired, and the company may specifically be looking for a physician who has a significant amount of clinical experience.

She did make the caveat that if the company is hiring for a senior level executive position where there may be a mandatory retirement age of 65, they're not going to hire a physician who is 62. These positions are uncommon, but it's important to understand the needs and situation of the company. And even if there's not a mandatory retirement age, the company may be looking for someone with upward growth and leadership potential versus someone who is in the zenith of their career.

In this case, they would want someone who's going to be able to stay in the company and grow maybe five years, ten years, and so that's going to be important when they're considering age and what the interest is in terms of the candidate's desire to work for a number of years.

She added that no company is going to come out and say we only hire up to a certain age, but you can get a sense of who and what they're looking for by the type of applicants that they consider. And it doesn't just obviously have to do with age. She mentioned a candidate who was 60 that she presented to a hiring company. He was retiring from a large pharma company, so he had a lot of experience, but they did not offer him an interview, and one of the reasons was that they were wondering what he was actually wanting when he was leaving this company where he had been for a long time, and he was very transactional in his interactions, meaning that he was really focused on what was in it for him, what was he going to get out of it, and that really doesn't work well for a company no matter what age you're at.

This next example is from Emma Nichols, and she is a founder of Nascent Medical, a company that provides medical writing services. She has about 70 subcontractors who are writers who work with her, and about as many clients. She also offers a course for physicians and others interested in becoming freelance medical writers, and she has been in the field for over several decades.

Emma Nichols shared that she thinks freelance medical writing and editing is particularly forgiving when it comes to the age issue. As long as you continue to learn, stay updated on the latest technology, and do a good job, it's just not important how old you are. Unlike with clinical jobs, you can more easily “hide” your age because of no direct contact with clients and using a Zoom filter. She said, I've seen many people working as medical writers in their 60s and 70s. Age is not an issue. Quality, responsiveness, and flexibility are much more important.

As I mentioned, Emma is in the field of freelance medical writing, which is a great fit for physicians who want that flexibility and also for physicians who are nearing retirement age and retired from clinical practice.

This third example is from Dr. Ronald Hirsch. Dr. Hirsch is the vice president of physician advisory solutions at R1 RCM. This is a company that offers physician advisory services to hospitals and healthcare systems. He has been in medicine for over three decades. Dr. Hirsch's personal opinion is that age is not a primary factor. It is a motivation leading the change in career trajectory that is crucial.

He goes on to give two examples of physicians who are in their 50s seeking a career change, and I'm paraphrasing here. The first one is a burned out physician who complains about the system and patients and all the insurance and administrative hassles. This physician is running away from medicine rather than towards something where he or she can make a positive contribution. If this is the case, then there will not be a lot of open doors.

The other example is a physician who has adapted to the changes in medicine and advances and still wants to make a difference. This person reads journals and keeps up with CME. He or she may not be able to keep up with the demands of working 150 percent in clinical medicine. There may be some health or family issues or disability necessitating a change, and if this is the case, then there are opportunities for this person.

This is something that we hear a lot in these conversations about being at the crossroads is you don't want to just be running away. You want to be running towards something, and companies can often tell this when you interview. And lastly, Dr. Hirsch added that we do have doctors working in his company who are over 70.

The fourth example I want to share is a physician who works at a major health insurance company, and he is involved in recruiting and interviewing. He said that a very recent hire was a physician who is in his late 60s and that he has many colleagues who are in their 60s and 70s. His oldest colleague was 86, and he passed away a few years ago.

He mentions that if you can perform the job well, you do not seem to age out of this job. He goes on to say that he has seen some cases where the older physicians struggle because of their lack of tech savviness and or speed, but he has also seen that in younger medical directors too. It seems that over time with new hires, regardless of age, everyone seems to have experience with technology. The EHR, the PACS, the PACS, which is picture archiving and communication system, Dragon, etc, that the transition to being a medical director using off-the-shelf and proprietary technology is not so much of a problem. I've heard that it was more so in the earlier days.

I asked him about comparing the level of productivity of older versus younger physicians, and he said it would appear that the work style of the medical director probably has a greater impact than age, though I would guess on average older medical directors might be a little bit slower, but probably not substantially so.

This brings up the fact that when a company is hiring, they have certain needs that need to be met, and age can be a factor, but it's much more about how the person performs the job, how they fit in the culture, their personality, the work ethic they bring to the table, and it can also have to do too with the circumstances around their situation when they're applying.

For example, if you have already left your job or have a very short notice that you need to give, you are often more desirable to the company than a physician who might have to give six months notice or four months notice, because I've seen situations where a company might take someone who's older who's equally well qualified than someone who's younger, because the younger candidate has a longer notice that they need to give, and that can sometimes be a deal breaker.

The fifth example I wanted to share is from an in-house recruiter at a major health insurance company. She was short and sweet, and she said, “I consider all ages. I also push back on hiring managers that comment about age. The only thing they should consider is clinical competency and computer test scores.” She added, “I would let your listeners know that they will be tested on computer skills, typing, operating systems, etc.”

This is good information just for anyone who's applying. Again, this is really about meeting the needs of the company and also making sure it's a good fit for you. So if you have a really good sense of what the company is looking for, what you might be tested on, what they want to see on your resume, what the culture is like at the company, you can first want to assess, “Is this a good fit for me? Because that's just as important as is it a good fit for them?”

And then see if there's anything you need to do that will increase your candidacy. Maybe you want to beef up your computer skills. Maybe you want to learn Excel. Maybe you want to get more comfortable using Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Don't forget, you've learned the Krebs cycle. You've learned how to do a central line. You've learned how to treat patients in DKA. You can replace needs. There's so many things you can do as a doctor that are so much harder than anything you'll have to do in a job, that if you don't have some of these skills now, you can learn them.

I have a few more things I want to say before we wrap up this episode. I wanted to mention my LinkedIn course for physicians. If you're looking for a job, no matter what age you are, it's really important to be on LinkedIn and have your profile optimized. In this course, we'll walk you step-by-step through everything you need to do, from uploading your photograph to having keywords in your profile so recruiters can find you for specific jobs. It also shows you how to signal recruiters that you're looking for opportunities without anyone else knowing.

This course has videos that will also show you how to send messages out to recruiters and others, how to network, how to search for and apply to jobs. If you're interested in learning more about my LinkedIn course for physicians, you can go to doctorscrossing.com website, go to the products tab at the top of the page, and you can learn more about the LinkedIn course. I will also have a link for the course in the show notes.

All right, back to wrapping up our episode. Let's just review the advantages that you have as a more seasoned physician. You have extensive, broad and deep clinical experience. And this is often the number one thing that companies are looking for when they hire you for nonclinical jobs. You also have the wisdom that comes with age. And you're not going on maternity leave. You aren't trying to juggle the responsibility of raising young children. Your life is often more stable at this time in your life.

There also may be a shift in your priorities. You may be okay with a lower salary to do what's meaningful for you. You may be more flexible about what you're able to do. And you also may be very interested in learning to do something different and flexing some different muscles.

And as I mentioned before, at the end of the day, it needs to be a good fit for you and the company, whether that's if you're working as an employee or a freelancer. If they're looking for someone to grow with them in advance, and you want to only work one or two more years, that might not be a great fit. If the company has their sights on a 30-year-old to be their social media marketing person, and you're 60 and afraid of Facebook, well, that won't work for them or you.

But if a company is looking for someone with that deep clinical knowledge, who still wants to work for a number of years, and you're in your 50s and your 60s, and we see maybe even older, and you're willing to learn, receive feedback, adapt to change, and get along with others, there are opportunities out there. Take the time to understand the needs of the company and how your experience can add value.

Consider who the other candidates might be and how you can distinguish yourself and go the extra mile to make a winning impression. And of course, make sure to be on LinkedIn and have that photo of your beautiful smiling self.

Stay tuned over the next couple of months for additional episodes that we'll be looking at. The financial aspects of planning for retirement, what are different job opportunities that you can do, and how to think about topics such as legacy, purpose, identity, maintaining your health, etc.

I want to thank you so much for being a listener and supporter of the podcast. I really appreciate all those of you who reach out and tell me how the podcast has made a big difference in your life. Please keep sharing the podcast and recommending it to others. That is so helpful and I really, really appreciate it.

Know that you matter and whatever job you're in right now, you're making a difference and your contribution is valuable, and your happiness is of utmost importance to me. And as always, 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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