



Planes, trains and automobiles: Who pays for what?

Just like in dating, there's not a hard-and-fast set of rules about who picks up the tab throughout the physician interview process. But here's a start.

BRUCE ARMON

Who pays for a first date? How about the second? As a relationship progresses, there can be traditional or expected protocols to follow. Same with the job interview process, which also can feel like a dating game.

As a physician considering a new opportunity—whether it's your first job after training or you're seeking the next step up on the professional ladder—it's important to understand your and a potential employer's role in paying for transportation, lodging, meals and related expenses during the interview process. These are the first "dates" that are the building blocks of your professional relationship.

It's also helpful to know that those building blocks are variable. There are no absolutes as it relates to these expenses and any other initial start-up costs employers may incur when bringing in new physicians.

PLANES, TRAINS, AUTOMOBILES AND LODGING

If you're traveling for an interview, determine in advance what the prospective employer will pay.

If you're traveling by car, log the related miles and tolls. (There is an IRS-approved rate of reimbursement for each mile traveled that may be used as a benchmark.) If you rent a car for the trip, ask for and retain the receipts. In either case, confirm *in advance* whether the prospective employer will pay for those expenses.

Traveling by train? Don't book a business class or first-class ticket without prior authorization from the prospective employer, and don't forget to record any cab expenses to the train station or parking garage.

If you need to take a plane to meet with a prospective employer, don't book anything other than a coach ticket without approval first.

You also shouldn't book a flight that lands only a short time before the beginning of the interview. Flight delays are out of your control and can cause both you and your prospective employer unnecessary angst.

Plan to grab the latest return flight home if same-day travel is planned, or opt to stay overnight so you have ample time to meet as many prospective colleagues as possible. Be sure to ask about the timing to get to and from the airport, too. Will you need to take a cab or rent a car?

If you're staying the night during the interview, ask your recruiter which lodging to use; there might be a preferred hotel. Don't expect your prospective employer to pay for room service or in-room entertainment expenses.

If you're invited to make multiple visits as part of your interview process, confirm before each visit that the expenses will be reimbursed as you're anticipating.

YOUR RELOCATION AND RELATED EXPENSES

As part of the contract negotiation process, consider the expenses you will incur before the first day of employment. If possible, coverage of these expenses should be built into your employment contract.

House-hunting expenses. It may take multiple visits to find housing, and you may need to bring a spouse or partner along on at least one of the visits. Discuss with the employer which house-hunting expenses, if any, will be reimbursed.

Housing expenses. An employer may consider offering an allowance for short-term housing or for a down payment on a house.

Moving expenses. It is common for an employer to offer a defined amount to help physicians with moving expenses. Call several moving companies to understand the expected fee range.

Review the employer's policy related to moving expenses. An employer may not, for example, pay to help you relocate a boat or a horse, or pay for two pick-ups as part of the same move. Storage facility costs may also not be covered.

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If the allowance that an employer is offering for moving expenses is more than the actual cost of the move, ask if you can use the excess dollars even without direct associated expenses.

Signing bonus. To attract a

physician to the job, a prospective employer may offer a signing bonus to help pay for incidental expenses. These expenses may be used to pay your COBRA health insurance expenses, for example.

Student loan expenses. Some

employers offer monthly, quarterly or annual payments directly to lending institutions to reduce your student loan balance.

License expenses. You'll need to have an active license to practice in the state where your new employer is located. Each license may cost several hundred dollars. And if you're practicing as a locum tenens, you may need medical licenses in many states.

In addition to the costs for the medical license, you'll also have a DEA registration. Many states have their own DEA-equivalent license that a physician also must obtain.

YOUR EMPLOYER'S RELATED EXPENSES

You're not the only one. Employers, too, incur significant costs before new physicians can begin employment.

An employer may need to hire additional staff, purchase additional supplies or acquire more equipment. Larger or additional office space may be needed.

Considerable staff time will be spent getting the new physician credentialed with each of the employer's third-party payers and securing hospital or facility privileges. Many hospitals and facilities charge an expense for the privilege of being credentialed by that institution.

An employer also may need to secure an additional electronic medical record license, or purchase a laptop for you.



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PROTECTING THE INVESTMENT

Employers expect to have a return on investment when hiring physicians. That investment may be measured by the clinical dollars you generate, the number of papers you publish, the quality of your teaching or the caliber of your research.

But not all employment relationships turn out as predicted. Some employers may quantify the costs incurred in hiring you—house-hunting and related travel, moving expenses, licensure fees, signing bonus, etc.—and include a clause in the employment agreement that requires repayment if you're not employed there for a defined period of time.

If a provision like this is included in the draft of your employment contract, understand how each individual cost and the total was calculated, the length of time you must remain employed, and any exceptions to the repayment provision. Exceptions could be related to the reason for termination, whether you generated a "profit" during your time employed, the amount of your account receivables by the date of termination, or other factors.

There are no "rules" when it comes to who pays for what throughout the dating—err, interview—process. Remember, the upfront costs incurred by an employer may be significant, so understand any circumstance in which you may be expected to repay the expenses.

Clearly addressing these issues is a good practice for both physicians and employers and can be used to

establish clear parameters once the "dating" is complete and actual employment begins. •

Bruce Armon, Esquire (barmon@saul.com), is a partner and chair of Saul Ewing's health care practice group. Bruce regularly

speaks to physician audiences regarding health law legal issues and has helped hundreds of clients with contract issues.

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