



## How to Attract the Best Candidates?

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## **Abstract**

The selection of an academic medical chair is one of the most important events in the life of an institution. The Dean of the Medical School should define the position with input from hospital administration and nursing. A proper selection of the search committee is vital to success. Its members should have academic credibility among their peers and be ready to make the required time commitment. Gender representation should be considered. Confidentiality is important and negative remarks about potential candidates should be provided in writing and verified. Including faculty members of the department may provide more expert insights but increases the risk of conflicts of interest. Cross-departmental representation and members from other academic institutions may bring in valuable new viewpoints. The recruitment package should contain a clear and flexible definition of the job responsibilities and accountability. The investment from the institution should include the personal requirements of the candidate such as remuneration, spouse employment, children schooling and tuition, housing and re-location issues; and professional prerequisites such as infrastructure (administration, space, and personnel), professional scientific and/or clinical critical mass, start-up funding, budgetary control and acceptable levels of managerial autonomy. The institution should exert sufficient flexibility to accommodate 'blue sky' visions from prospective candidates. This could take the form of new provision of infrastructure, staffing, space, personnel or other resources based on a clear plan and strategy with a minimum 5-year projection and regular peer-review. Above all, the candidate must have a "fire in the belly" to lead the Department.

The selection of an academic medical chair is one of the most important events in the life of an institution. Medical chairs have the ability to help set the direction of an institution. The medical chair is critical in developing the next generation of leaders. The medical chair has the ability to create new programs that are innovative and set the institution apart from others. The medical chair also has the ability to use resources wisely in order to advance the department and the institution. A medical chair, who cannot fulfill these functions becomes a burden to the institution, resources are wasted, faculty become unhappy and look for other opportunities and the leaders of the institution are placed in the uncomfortable position of either dismissing the individual from a leadership position or finding ways to work around the medical chair. Because more and more institutions believe that silo mentality will not help an institution to be successful, cross disciplinary collaboration is becoming increasingly important. A medical chair that only concerns him or herself with the department will not be successful in the future<sup>1</sup>.

For all of these reasons it's imperative that these three questions be answered. First, who will define the structure of the position. In order to judge candidates, the selection committee must know the breadth and depth of the position. A detailed description of the position is necessary and, therefore, who creates the criteria is important. Once this question is answered the next question is how should the search committee be comprised and who selects the search committee. The last question flows from the first two; namely, what makes the candidate want to apply for the position or in other words, what is an attractive recruitment package.



Before we discuss the three questions, there needs to be an acknowledgement that medical chairs are not all the same. Medical chairs in the basic sciences have no clinical responsibility to provide medical care. Some medical chairs in clinical departments may only lead the research and educational mission, and are only tangentially involved in clinical care. In this situation, it will be important for the chair to develop a relationship with leaders responsible for direct patient care. In other institutions, the medical chair is responsible for the “tripartite” mission, and often has responsibility not only for the medical school, but also for hospital resources. We will try to address these differences in the questions.

**Question 1: Who should define the structure of the position?**

Ultimately the Dean of the Medical School will define the position, but this should not be done in a vacuum. The dean should seek advice from people within the organization, who are directly responsible for research and education of the institution. If the position is for a basic science department, input should be gained from other schools within the University. If the medical chair is responsible for a clinical department, the input from hospital administration and nursing is important<sup>2</sup>. Medical chairs, that have been in their position may also be helpful in crafting the criteria for the position. A set of clearly defined goals for the department can further clarify the position<sup>3</sup>.

**Question 2: How to select the search committee?**

Proper selection of the search committee is vital to success<sup>4</sup>. People on the search committee must make the time commitment that is required. The size of the search committee should be commensurate with the size of the department; i.e. small departments = small search committees (approximately 5-8). Large departments should have a larger committee since the scope of the department is large (approximately 12-14). The committee should represent the broad interests of the institution. The membership should represent the entire faculty, and not just professors. The committee is further strengthened by consideration of gender for inclusion.

When possible, having one or two experts from another University can be helpful, not only in the evaluation of the candidate, but also enhances the search for suitable candidates. The members of the search committee must keep the discussion within the search committee confidential. Negative remarks about potential candidates must be verified and in writing. Too often hear say can eliminate an excellent candidate without cause. The chairman of the search committee and one other member of the committee should report back to the Department on a regular basis the progress of the search. There are varying opinions on two main issues – inclusion of a faculty member from the department and the presence of the Dean on the search committee. Speaking in favor of a faculty member from the department gives the other members more insight into the current positive and negatives. On the other hand, the faculty member may have a hidden agenda and can sway the discussion in a direction, that might benefit that faculty member. Less controversial is inclusion of the Dean on the search committee. If the Dean is comfortable with delegation of responsibility to the search committee to find the best candidate, then there is no need for the Dean



to be on the search committee. If the Dean wants to be highly involved, it has the tendency to diminish the role of the search committee, and therefore the recommendation is not to have the Dean on the search committee. It must be remembered, however, that the search committee is only advising to the Dean and the final decision on a candidate is the **sole responsibility of the Dean**.

### **Question 3: How to make an attractive recruitment package?**

There are two main considerations, when an institution tries to recruit a new leader – personal needs and department needs.

On the personal side, salary and benefits should be in line with other medical chairs and outside data should be gathered to know, if the salary and benefits are within the normal boundaries. Other recruitment incentives have included moving expenses, a one time sign on bonus, housing, educational benefits for family members, and other benefits that may be unique for the institution. Because of increased public interest, many institutions have scaled back personal benefits and have relied on salary and uniformed benefit packages. More recently, the role of the spouse must be considered, especially if the spouse has a medical background. Finding an appropriate position for the spouse either at the home institution or in the region can be very helpful in recruitment. Attempting to take into account all of the needs of a family moving to a new institution can be pivotal in Recruitment. Someone should be assigned to help with real estate, schools, banking and other issues, that might arise during the recruitment period.

The department needs and the resources to fill these needs are often the best recruitment package. If the candidate feels assured that the resources he or she has requested could help build the department, then this makes recruitment much easier. There also needs to be assurance that, when needs arise in the future, the institution will listen to these needs and help find the resources to fill that void. Above all, the candidate must have a “fire in the belly” to lead the department. If the candidate sees the position as one of many problems and does not have a vision of where the department could be in five years, then the department will not move forward and you have a failed medical leader.

On the other hand, a medical leader who inspires the search by his or her vision is pragmatic in approach to problems and is articulate in his or her vision, then the search committee has found the right candidate for the position.

### **In summary:**

Academic medical leaders have great responsibility to lead an institution found especially during times of change<sup>5</sup>. The selection of these leaders is crucial. Critical attention must be focused on a complete job description, the makeup of the search committee and the time and attention to attracting and interviewing potential candidates. Once the candidate is selected, then successful recruitment can only be possible, if the resources for both personal and professional success can be assured. The process should be deliberative, but needs to show steady motion forward. Prolonged recruitments are often not successful. A timeline should be established to ensure a timely final decision of the appropriate candidate so that the Dean can start negotiations.

### **References**

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