
INSIDE THE MIND OF A HIRING PHYSICIST

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Have you ever wished you knew what a potential employer is looking for in a candidate? Maybe you have wished you could see into the mind of those who make the decision on who to hire before you even step foot in the door to your interview? What steps can you take to make sure you nail that interview, starting from your resume to the personal interview? To assist with this, we interviewed four Chief Physicists from various oncology centers. We asked each of them the same eight questions and received very valuable insight into the mind of the hiring physicist. We would like to give a special thank you to the physicists who participated: John Dorr, MS, DABR, Beth Ghavidel, MS DABR, Nichole Hill, MS, DABR, and Giovanni Laslo, PhD.

What specific traits do you look for when interviewing/hiring a dosimetrist for your facility?

They need to be methodical in their approach to problem solving and willing to learn new things. They need to have an approach to doing a plan as well as an approach to wrap up. For example, I would like to hire a dosimetrist who won't just figure it out once, but rather figure out the right way to do something so they can repeat it 1,000 times.

I feel two of the most important traits in a dosimetrist are communication and initiative. The physician will often quickly and randomly communicate their orders. It's important a dosimetrist can be secure in their understanding of those orders and even more important they take the initiative to clarify when necessary.

I am looking for someone that is highly skilled but personable and approachable at the same time. I prefer dosimetrists that like to problem solve and can multitask. It is also important that the dosimetrist have good customer skills and is flexible with meeting other team members on a level that they understand/communicate.

Broad demonstrable competence on all treatment planning techniques and modalities, particularly all the treatment techniques in use at the site that is hiring. Familiarity with motion management approaches and understanding of current image guidance techniques. It is also important to require some management skills: how they work under pressure, how they relate to physician

demands (reasonable and less reasonable), how they relate to physicists, therapists, managers.

When reviewing a resume, what makes one dosimetrist stand out from another?

Experience with the TPS we have and being current stands out. Also, having a firm grasp of IMRT techniques is the future of this field, so that always helps. A dosimetrist who spends time explaining the optimization methodologies they are proficient in. Lastly, experience with SRS/SBRT is important.

Honestly, I feel in the past, I will immediately be turned off by any grammatical or formatting errors. A dosimetrist must have a high attention to detail, and if you are able to submit your first impression with a lack of detail, it's not a good fit. When it's a clean, crisp, well-written resume, it stands out to me.

I like to see that they are experienced with most types of planning. Years of experience matter some, but not the scope of the person. Sometimes it is better to get someone with less experience that will grow into the culture of the clinic I am in as they are more pliable.

I look for signs that the dosimetrist is a quick learner and a solid performer on more than one treatment planning system. Experience with protocols is important. Depending on the characteristics of the site he or she will be working at, I look for comfort with standard planning (VMAT a must), or more advanced techniques, or brachytherapy.

What do you NOT like to see included in a resume?

A whole lot of insignificant details. For example, you don't need to say 3D breast with wedges etc., you can just say 3D breast. Also, don't include what you have SEEN, but rather what you are proficient in.

In addition to #2, I am cautious when an employee has only had one employer over the course of decades – possibly may be difficult to adapt to new environment. To the same point, an employee that has around 3ish or more jobs over the course of 10 years. Saying that, there are always exceptions and great explanations for these cases. It's just a hard pause for me.

Gaps in employment, job hopping (less than 2 years at each place).

Experience with only one TPS will make me ask more questions. Mention of many special procedures will make me question just what the level of proficiency with any of them is.

When reviewing a resume prior to an interview, what specific items are you looking for: skills, education, volunteer work, other items?

As far as volunteering goes, include it if it is volunteering internally or being on a team that tackles a relevant clinical problem. Volunteering in the community is not super important unless you are passionate about it.

As far as experience goes, many years of being a therapist in pre-IGRT times no longer helps you over a dosimetrist with no radiation therapy experience. If it's an onsite position, it's very important you have a personal reason as to why they want to be in the region.

Skills, experience, education.

When interviewing multiple dosimetrists, what item(s) would make you want to hire one dosimetrist over another?

The ability to carry a conversation and articulate thoughts without being scattered.

The in-person interview is so important when matching chemistry of existing staff. I feel that there is not one main type of personality that is "correct" for a dosimetrist simply because there is such a spread in personalities among physicians. It's about the best match.

It is important that they connect with people in an honest and open manner.

A better understanding of the position that he/she is applying for and the ability to communicate why he/she is best qualified for it.

Would you consider a non-CMD for hire if they are eligible to sit for the MDCB exam?

Yes, only if they are entry-level.

It's a "ding" on the resume simply because of the current landscape of the field. But it's hard for me to properly answer this due to my lack of knowledge on whether accreditations require CMDs.

Yes.

I would if they are eligible and it is an entry level position, but with the provision that certification will be attained within a given timeframe.

Would you hire a dosimetrist who has many years clinical experience but isn't a CMD?

No.

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It depends on the person and their skillset. I would honestly question the fact that they are not a CMD, but also know that some of the seasoned dosimetrists do quite well with the new technology/planning methods. That said, you can run the risk of someone not understanding the optimizers and other planning tools if they were on-the-job trained.

No.

Do you think it is important for an interviewing dosimetrist to do one or two plans during their interview to assess their skills?

We have been blessed by being a part of a clinical internship program which is basically a 720-hour interview.

I think it would be great if that were the standard when interviewing dosimetrists. Unfortunately, it is not, and it isn't normally built into interview schedules, but in place of that challenge, I think asking a few technical questions about planning can help to some extent.

I personally feel this would be very advantageous during interview. I believe it can be quite difficult to judge a potential candidate through Q&A. While one may be able to set up questions to dig deep into the ability of the candidate; without seeing their skills, it really is difficult to truly judge whether they meet the expectations of the clinic in question.

I think if they are familiar with the software, it's fair but not necessary. The main point is to get a feel for how they handle and have knowledge of the optimizer, how flexible they are to adapt to other practices. Just my 2 cents.