

KINGFISHERPM – APPLYING TO BE A PRACTICE MANAGER

Applying to be a Practice Manager

“Jack of All Trades”

It is important to remember that a GP Practice Manager needs to be a Jack of All Trades and that his or her ability to delegate work to others will depend on the size of the Practice, the number of doctors and the number of staff. The job description should give a major clue as to the type of work and skills that might be needed. Ideally in a large practice a manager might be able to delegate to others but don't expect not to have to change a light bulb. The salary offered might range from under £20,000 to over £40,000pa but even on a higher salary you may find yourself with a light bulb in hand. Be warned.

The Application

When applying for any job completing the application form if one is provided is your chance to provide enough information that is relevant to the post on offer. Don't add extra pages if you can help it. Remember the employer may have to go through loads of applications and is likely to be more impressed by those that are precise and to the point rather than those rattle on for England....

Be wary of spelling and grammar to! Whilst you are not required to say what your age is an employer will want to have a broad idea of how much time you have spent gaining your experience. Adding a section detailing your skills can help. Say what software packages you are familiar with and what training courses you have attended. A sensible employer will avoid asking or expecting you to answer questions that might infer a bias or discrimination on grounds of sex, sexual orientation, age, race or religion. GP Practices might prefer you to be registered as a patient elsewhere.

Communications in the NHS

The employer may ask you to submit your application via email. The reason for this is two-fold. Firstly it speeds up communications and secondly it shows whether you are proficient in using the internet and have keyboard skills. Communications in the NHS and general practice are now primarily by email. Receiving a typed letter in the post is now a rarity. You will need an NHS email address if appointed along with a smart card. Your own email address may not be confidential.

Shortlisting

An employer in the current economic climate may receive a very large number of applications. So there might be 100 enquiries, and 50 applications. It is not therefore possible to interview all applicants. A harsh shortlisting exercise is then required.

Employers set themselves a series of criteria to mark applications against. Some criteria need to be essential whilst others are only desirable. For example it might be essential for a candidate to have experience in keeping accounts or using professional software. Whilst it might be desirable to have used a specialist GP software accounts system or a well-known package such as Sage or Quicken. Having worked in the NHS or the Private health sector might be essential whilst working in general practice might be desirable. These are just a couple of examples of criteria that might be used but there may be many others looking at people management, new technology, premises management. contracting and the organization of meetings.

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The employer might also consider that skills are often transferrable and that is how the Civil Service tends to work. So it must always be accepted that employees can always learn new tricks. Applicants who are already senior managers may well have some if not all of the desired skills and experience in abundance along with evidence of educational achievement but often do not have the practical skills of doing a job themselves. For instance running a payroll and keeping accounts using a software package.

The employer has to set about making a shortlist normally by marking applications against the criteria. The larger the number of applicants the more likely it is that there will be many applicants who score well on essential criteria but slightly less on desirable criteria. In any event there still may be more high scoring applicants but it would not be possible to interview everyone. The applications attracting the most points might again need to be sifted through in more detail by the 'employers' and voted upon with a view to producing a shortlist of applicants that can be reasonably interviewed in one or two days. The voting might then take into account a more detailed look at the application, its content, its quality, and the overall impression it has given. Brevity and clarity might be preferred over exaggeration and wordiness. Applicants might need to avoid over-selling themselves. Modesty can be a virtue. A final shortlist of 5 or 6 candidates is drawn up and invitations sent out.

It would not be practicable to give each candidate not shortlisted a personal explanation as to why he or she was not shortlisted. However not all those invited for interview might turn up. So, more candidates might be called up for interview.

The Final Say – 10 points

- Use the application form provided – don't add numerous extra pages
- Submit a two page CV
- Make sure you are available for interview – employers won't wait
- Don't send testimonials
- Be clear when your references can be taken up e.g. prior to interview
- Use one email address preferably in your name
- Find out about job – do your research without pestering employer before being called for interview
- If contacting employer do it during working hours
- Don't ask if you have been shortlisted yet!
- Only ask why you did not get the job if you are interviewed

Applying for jobs is a waiting game and often disappointing – keep trying you will get there in the end.

Robert Campbell - November 2011