Approaching the consultant’s interview

The last couple of years of training provide some unique challenges. Whilst you’ve had your eye firmly fixed on getting through the FFICM and keeping a pristine portfolio it’s all too easy to take your eye off the final prize…the consultant’s job you’ve worked so hard to get.

With that in mind it’s wise to start your preparation early and reduce the inevitable stress which accompanies the run up to the interview.

Two years to go

Now is the time to interrogate your CV and look for holes which need addressing. By doing this early you are giving yourself time to take on projects. There are several ways to evaluate your CV. A great tip is to register with NHS jobs and peruse a similar job’s application form. Make a note the type of questions you’re going to be asked (they’re often quite different to those encountered for more junior roles) and think about how this relates to your own experience. You’ll soon see your strengths and weaknesses. Any projects undertaken from here should be targeted to work to the strengths you wish to promote or to help address weaknesses. Most trainees struggle to demonstrate direct involvement with one or more aspects of quality improvement, risk and change management.

One year to go

Hopefully prospective departments are starting to take interest in you as a prospective consultant colleague. Identify departments where you want to work as consultant and arrange a meeting with the clinical lead. Professional courtesy often pays dividends but it is worth remembering that you are a precious commodity and you should feel able to politely ask questions about the strengths, weaknesses and future of the department. This can feel unnatural but it is likely that well directed questions will impress rather than offend a prospective employer. By enquiring about deficiencies in their skill mix you may find yourself a unique selling point which makes you an attractive candidate.

This is the also time to write your Consultant application CV. There are good sample consultant CVs online or you can ask a respected consultant colleague to share their own resume for guidance.

It’s also worth having a look at similar jobs’ person specifications at this point. Do you meet all the essential criteria? You may need to update mandatory training courses to be eligible to apply.

Six months to go
You should have the potential job firmly in your sights now. Start the application early. Online application systems such as NHS jobs will allow you to start an application and save as you go along. Despite this it is always worth writing free text in a Word document and then cutting and pasting to allow you to edit freely and without risk of unseen editorial mistakes. Choose a trusted colleague to proof read this for you.

**Three months to go**

Once you’ve been shortlisted for a post it’s prudent to arrange pre-interview visits at the Trust. Local protocols will differ, so establish locally who you are expected to visit. It will most likely include the Clinical Lead for the department, Medical Director, Chief Executive and may include nursing managers for the Trust. This is a time for you to ask questions so think carefully about what you wish to know in advance. You should take copies of your CV and it’s wise consider this a mini-interview.

Now is the time to start interview practice. Gain a thorough understanding of the local interview process and treat it as you would an examination. It is unlikely you will be asked clinical questions so focus your studies elsewhere unless you are told otherwise. Arrange interview practice and consider attending an interview skills course, many of which are highly commended.

**One month to go**

You are now a well-oiled machine. You should make sure you’re regularly undertaking interview practice and have any required presentations prepared. The majority of candidates massively overestimate their knowledge of their own CV. You should know this inside out and be prepared to answer probing questions about your own work. Practice model answers for these common questions as they are a gift.

**One week to go**

Make your life as easy as possible. Try on your chosen attire to check it fits and doesn’t raise any eyebrows! Plan your route to the interview (and do a dummy run if you think it necessary).

Use this time to review the members of the interview panel to see if you can elicit clues as to what may be asked. And remember that practice makes perfect so target people who will be honest with you to hone your answers.

**On the day**

It may sound like a cliché but try your best to enjoy the day. You have spent years training for this very moment and you should be proud to present the very best of your skills, experience and potential to your prospective employer.

Good luck!
Dr Maryam Crews
ICM consultant