

Tips for Fellows Starting the Neurointensivist Job Search

By Saef Izzy, MD



As the next recruitment season for neurointensivists is approaching, learning about the recruitment process, the best time to submit job applications, and how to get in touch with Neuro ICU directors are all key questions in the mind of many of my co-fellows who are applying this year. To find more answers, I reached out to and interviewed Neuro ICU directors who recently interviewed fellows for faculty positions to present their perspectives regarding the recruitment process. I also interviewed two senior fellows who already signed their contracts to share their experiences.

I hope this article assists neurocritical care fellow in learning about the recruitment process. My take home points are that now is about the time to start thinking about what path you would like to pursue (academia or private practice). In the next few months, start communicating with ICU directors. Remember everything is negotiable, the job is partly about what is described by the chair or ICU director but also about what we want to make of our career.



Dr. Halinder Mangat, Director of Cornell Neurocritical Care Unit

"One of the toughest tasks after a rigorous two-year fellowship is to land a 'fantastic job', which can be a bit of a challenge. I recommend fellows identify the most important determinants in their careers and personal lives (being close to a spouse, getting an early investigator NIH grant, etc.). Based on this most important criterion, one should contact as many directors as possible (in the region or academic area of interest) at least one year ahead of the fellowship completion date. The NCS Annual Meeting offers a perfect venue and timing for preliminary discussions.

It is critical to understand the needs of the group in addition to identifying one's own needs and desires. Increasingly, academic centers are trying to groom junior faculty for research careers with the aim of successfully getting extramural funding. Therefore, protected time can (and must) be provided. While research tops the list in most academic centers, education, global health, quality improvement, etc. are other available opportunities. Finally, the interview process should not be a stressful and intimidating process, considering that the group members will shortly be colleagues.

Research achievements always help but, in most centers, it is not the most important factor. Even in the research oriented institutions, you are not expected to have independent funding yet. We care about the potential. Will this person ever get a grant? Is this person saying he or she wants to do research just to impress us? As such, if you are an amazing researcher but incompetent clinically, your chance is close to zero except maybe for very few centers looking strictly for a lab person.



Dr. Andrew Naldech, Director of Northwestern University Neurocritical Care Unit

"[I found out about job availabilities through the] NCS website, communicating with faculty at other institutions, and emailing the ICU directors. All of these are good options, but be sure to use your faculty not only for their knowledge, but their connections and their advice on which programs are the best fit for your career. This is still a

field with two degrees of separation, and most everyone knows (or knows of) nearly everyone else.

You should start thinking during the spring at the end of your first year. Offers are often finalized by the winter. The ICU director often isn't the person who makes hiring decisions, rather, the head of a department or a center, so find out whom to approach. Chairs will often have specific agendas for grant funding or productivity, and will hire accordingly. If you fill an uncovered clinical niche, be sure to highlight how you can help their program. If you have a specific research interest or track record, show how it will help that program grow. Finally, whatever happens, keep your chin up and smile. Your life is likely to get better in a hurry come July next year."



Dr. Kiwon Lee, Director of the Neuroscience ICU at University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston

"ICU faculty positions are often in flux – some people get irresistible offers elsewhere, some people cannot stand their boss, etc. People leave. There may be an opening even in centers that are known to be "full." Even if they are "full," if you are such a strong candidate, they may even create a position. The tip is to keep an eye on the centers that are expanding aggressively and increasing their beds. Even if they are not posting a job, believe me they need more people.

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You do not want to look or sound like a lazy person. This is a red flag for the employers. Yes, you want to have some protected time to do certain academic activities, but try not to give the impression of reluctance to work hard. Often times, the ICU directors may not be able to give you exactly how many weeks of clinical duty. The moment you care about 40% versus 45%, it is again a red flag for the employers. So be flexible."



Shouri Lahiri, MD, neurocritical care fellow at New York Presbyterian Columbia and Cornell Medical Center

"Although it is difficult to compare to prior years, my overall impression of the job market is that it is still relatively good. There were openings at major academic institutions including big cities such as New York, Boston, and Los Angeles and, of course, many private practice positions. I came across job openings from my program director, other faculty members, and the NCS website. I think it is essential

to decide what type of position one wants and to begin to communicate professional and personal needs even prior to physically interviewing somewhere. This will help focus your attention and time on the positions that are best suited to your needs. It is very different from finding a training position where there are generally fewer variables that one needs to consider partly because most aspects of the position are non-negotiable. I found it helpful to discuss aspects of contract negotiation with mentors and highly recommend this."



Xuemel Cai, MD, neurocritical care fellow at MGH/ BWH Harvard Medical School

"I started looking for a job my first year of fellowship because my spouse is in the medical field and we were essentially looking for a job in the same city. I asked the faculty at my program for help in identifying contact people in different cities. I looked at both academic programs (met with chairs and ICU directors) and also private practice programs. I utilized the NCS website as well as a

physician recruiting firm (Rosman, who I interviewed on the phone with and decided they were an additional resource worth considering). While location was probably the single most important factor for me, I was also interested in clinical service details: how big the ICU was, who worked in the day-to-day patient care of the ICU, as well as how much research time there would be and opportunities for mentorship and formal clinical research training (masters in clinical science, MPH, etc). In the end, I chose an academic position with a two-year clinical research training fellowship through industry. My advice is be flexible and be honest with yourself on what is important to you."

What are Our Priorities for Training Neurocritical Care Physicians?

By Saef Izzy, MD

Please complete this anonymous five-minute education survey:
<https://redcap.partners.org/redcap/surveys/?s=zKEbBipchF>

Participants will be entered into an **Apple Watch raffle**. Instructions for the raffle will be provided upon survey completion.

Your participation is highly valued. Please kindly distribute the survey link to your nursing and physician colleagues (staff, fellows, and residents).

Thank you,
 Abigail S. Cohen (MGH)
 Dr. Stephen Figueroa (UTSW)
 Dr. Christiana Hall (UTSW)
 Dr. Saef Izzy (MGH/BWH)
 Dr. Monisha Kumar (Penn)
 Dr. David McDonagh (UTSW)
 Dr. Eric Rosenthal (MGH)
 Dr. Lori Shutter (UPMC)
 Dr. Paul Vespa (UCLA)



The Neurointensivist Job Search: Tips from ICU Directors and Graduating Fellows

By Saef Izzy, MD



As the new recruitment season is speedily approaching, many of my co-fellows who are applying this year are very interested in learning about the job search process. To answer some of their key questions and to orient the readers about this process, I interviewed Neuro ICU directors who recently interviewed fellows for faculty positions. I also reached out to senior fellows

from the University of Pittsburgh, Johns Hopkins, and Harvard neurocritical care programs to tell readers about their perspectives on the recruitment process.

I hope this article helps fellows to learn more about the job search process. The NCS Resident and Fellow Taskforce will be organizing a pre-conference Professionalism and Leadership seminar as part of the Future Leader's Forum at 2016 NCS Annual Meeting. It will include workshops covering many of the recruitment topics as well as contract negotiation and will also be an excellent opportunity to network.



Carmelo Graffagnino, MD

Carmelo Graffagnino, Chief of the Division of Neurocritical Care and Vascular Neurology, Duke University

We are an academic focused program and our approach to faculty recruitment has always been to bring talented new neurointensivists into our practice that offered a unique and complementary addition to our program. Most faculty members have multiple subspecialty training in addition to neurocritical care, covering the following areas: vascular neurology, neurophysiology, palliative care, neurotrauma, neuroanesthesia, translational lab research, and education (fellowship and residency programs directors).

Fellows should present themselves to a prospective program by offering unique but complementary skills that the program of interest is seeking. First and foremost, we expect strong neurocritical care clinical skills but then afterwards the candidate needs to offer the program something that others in the practice are not already doing thus strengthening the program.

My advice to junior fellows is to work with your fellowship directors from the very start in structuring your training such that you have that special skill set that sets you apart. Productivity in terms of research, publications, and presentations at meetings is one of your best ways to advertise your special interests.

Keep in mind the best place is in-person at the NCS meeting while presenting your work or giving talks. Getting to talk to you in person is basically your first interview. Be honest about your goals in life. Don't promise to be a great researcher (everyone promises that) unless you already have something to show for it. If teaching

is your passion, what have you achieved as a resident and fellow in terms of teaching recognition, papers on education (yes teaching research is a viable pathway)?



Kevin Sheth, MD

Kevin Sheth, Director and Division Chief, Neurocritical Care and Emergency Neurology, Yale School of Medicine

For the fellows who are applying for jobs this year, I think the NCS website and the job listing page in *Currents* are both excellent resources to search for jobs. The key step is to touch base with your faculty mentors and ask them to help you identify contacts in your cities and programs of interest. To find out about private practice jobs, recruiters will start sending you emails and reaching out to you in the next few months, but you could also contact recruitment firms and find out what jobs are available out there.

The best time to reach out to ICU directors is variable. As a matter of fact, there is no good or bad time. ICU faculty positions are often in flux and maybe there are openings even in centers that are known to be fully staffed. Dynamic factors like medical school, department, and hospital finances always play a role in creating new positions when the right candidate is interested and available. My advice is to contact your programs of interest on the earlier side to express your interest and always follow up with the director throughout the process.

During the interview process, my advice to all of you is to be knowledgeable about what kind of career you would like, as this will make you more thoughtful about your job decisions. There are many other essential factors for applicants like location and income, but mentorship and research resources might be of high value for other applicants who are interested in academics. My advice is to be flexible and honest with yourself on what is important to you and respectful to programs during your communication.



Deepa Malatyandi, MD

Deepa Malatyandi, neurocritical care fellow University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

The prospect of finding one's first job often conjures a mix of apprehension, excitement, and uncertainty. After years of preconditioning to accept, as fate, the wisdom of the match, the possibilities can overwhelm. I found nothing more valuable than the team of invested mentors I was fortunate to have. The information below is a compilation of their wisdom and my experience.

An organized approach can alleviate much of the angst. I started by surveying the NCS website as well as *Currents* in the fall of my junior year. This was mostly to identify centers by region and

to ascertain the type and number of opportunities available. By midyear, I had created a list of key factors by which I would define my search. These might include geography, a spouses' career, research funding, open versus closed unit, practice environment, school districts, etc... Also, I started to refine my 5-10 year career goals, including future projects, and determined how many weeks of service and what combination of practice would allow me to achieve those goals.

Once you have determined the above, approach your mentors at the start of your second year as they will often be able to contact colleagues at various institutions. I found places were interviewing as early as September, keeping in mind that private practice tends to interview earlier than academia. Reaching out to unit directors at least one month prior to the NCS Annual Meeting allows you to schedule sit-downs with prospective employers. Before your interviews, make sure to have created a "list of asks" that is prioritized. Try to get a sense during the interview, of what your worth would be to that department to determine if it would be a mutually beneficial opportunity.



Shreyansh Shah
MD

**Shreyansh Shah, neurocritical care fellow
Harvard Medical School**

Fellows entering their final year of training will soon start the daunting task of finding that perfect job. While the task in hand seems intimidating, there is no dearth of good opportunities. Some introspection in the beginning to identify essential qualities you want in that job will go a long way in narrowing down the choices. Getting a taste of what different settings have to offer is not a bad idea either as I did before deciding

on academics versus private practice. Remember that many of the openings are already claimed before they are publicized and instead of waiting for a job announcement, cold calling by emails to department chairs and ICU directors is completely OK!

The NCS Annual Meeting offers a great opportunity for networking. Make sure that you plan well in advance through emails to confirm meeting times with the faculty members. It was at the NCS meeting last year where my program director introduced me to the director of the Neuro ICU where I

eventually ended up – Duke University. For the interviews, keep in mind that potential employers are most interested in knowing what your long term plans are and what additional asset you will add to their department.



Pravin George,
MD

**Pravin George, neurocritical care fellow
Johns Hopkins University**

Like so many transitions in life, the evolution from neurocritical care fellow to neurocritical care attending happens in almost the blink of an eye. Start early, no time during your fellowship is too early. Looking back through my own experiences with the process, one of the most important pieces of advice that was offered to me was to put together a "checklist of wants." If you are applying with a spouse or significant other, ensure that they also go over your checklist prior to your first interview.

At the conclusion of each interview, put together the program's answers to the checklist together on a spreadsheet. This helps tremendously with your final decision. Next, consider whether you would want to be in an academic or a private position. Each has their advantages. Completing a research project, working on a K grant or towards an R01, and teaching new fellows and residents in a well known academic position can be rewarding, but so can a very healthy paycheck from a private group.

Create a professional CV and constantly update it during your fellowship. Pick a location. If you know your ideal location, learn about the programs in that area and try to set up an interview while at the NCS Annual Meeting. The NCS meeting is one of the better recruitment opportunities for fellows. Generally, the NCS website, the program's website, or your own institution's faculty may have contacts and connections that can help you.

