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The doctor is in

Physician-recruitment site exceeds quota

Cincinnati Business Courier - July 21, 2006 by James Ritchie Staff Reporter

With a physician-recruitment effort exceeding its two-year goal, some believe it's getting easier to hire doctors in Greater Cincinnati.

CincinnatiMDjobs.com, a free physician employment site, expected to match 65 doctors with jobs in the two years ending in December 2006.

With six months to go, it's helped to place 90.

"I think what was missing before was that there wasn't a lot of visibility of the jobs that were available," said Lisa Adkinson, executive director of the Cincinnati MD Resource Center, which launched the Web site in August 2004.

In 2003, Cincinnati had a shortage of 520 doctors compared with 10 other Midwestern cities, according to a study by the Health Improvement Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati, which started the Cincinnati MD Resource Center, and the Cincinnati Business Committee, a group of business leaders.

The groups haven't compiled new data, but some think the overall recruitment picture has not changed much.

"We still haven't seen a significant increase in applicants to this market," said Pamela Zipperer-Davis, CEO of Greater Cincinnati Associated Physicians, or GCAP. "I think a large part of it is reimbursement."

The 31-doctor practice has hired two family medicine physicians this year, one who was practicing in Cincinnati and another who was practicing in eastern Ohio. She concedes that some might be turned off by a lifestyle factor: GCAP doctors see their own hospitalized patients at a time when many practices relinquish that duty to hospitalists.

Cincinnati has been known as an area where physician reimbursement from insurance companies lagged cities such as Indianapolis, Columbus and Lexington, said Robert Scroggins, a principal in Clayton L. Scroggins Associates Inc., a Cincinnati-based practice management consulting firm.

But doctors and hospitals "eventually pushed back to a point they had to be heard by the carriers," he said, and the area seems to be moving toward parity.

"Since we're seeing some of that change, we're starting to see it become more attractive along those lines," Scroggins said. "But it takes some time to recover and overcome the negative reputation."

A 2002 lawsuit by physicians and the Academy of Medicine of Cincinnati alleged that Aetna Inc., Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Humana of Ohio and UnitedHealthcare conspired to use

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7/24/2006

anticompetitive practices to suppress reimbursements. Aetna, Anthem and Humana have agreed to settlements. Scroggins wouldn't say the settlements had a direct effect on the recent improvement in recruiting, but he said the lawsuit did draw attention to the issue.

Hiring primary care doctors is not so hard, said Vicki Muennich, manager of medical system development and practice management for TriHealth, but specialists and subspecialists still are a challenge. She has had some success with CincinnatiMDjobs.com, which allows practices to list their openings and doctors to post their CVs.

"Success (means) the ones that stay," Muennich said. "If there's a tie to the community, like family or school, we find that those people are the successful ones. The flip side is we bring in people for different positions and they never want to leave because it's such a good city."

To help doctors build ties to the area, the MD Resource Center and sponsors put on several events, such as recognition ceremonies and wine tastings.

Dr. Mary Beth Brune recently came to Group Health Associates, part of TriHealth, from Louisville, where she had practiced for 11 years after going there for medical school. The jobs Web site helped, because although the internist is a Northern Kentucky native, "I hadn't lived in this area since I was 17 years old."

"I was trying to find a job without really knowing anything about the medical community here," said Brune, who decided on the move following a divorce.

Because she's an employed physician, reimbursement isn't at the forefront for her as it would be for a doctor in private practice. But she said she can earn just as much here as she did in Louisville.

Of the 90 physicians CincinnatiMDjobs.com had a role in recruiting, 33 were from outside a 14-county Greater Cincinnati area and 35 already were here, Adkinson said. For the remaining 22, she didn't yet have complete data.

Thirty-two had just finished residency or fellowship training, and 36 had at least a year of experience.

The site has 131 listings and maintains a database of about 300 doctors interested in working in the Cincinnati area. The MD Resource Center advertises the openings nationally in specialty magazines and newsletters.

For some hard-to-fill specialty positions, Adkinson said, the MD Resource Center has had little or no luck in identifying candidates. Dermatologists, neurosurgeons and psychiatrists are tough to find.

But sometimes it works the other way. She has eight candidates in pathology, four in thoracic surgery and three in nuclear medicine -- and no jobs for them.

The new recruits

Thirty-six of the physicians hired had at least one year of experience.

Of those, 16 were already in Greater Cincinnati. Twenty of them came from outside the area.

Thirty-two of the physicians hired had just finished training.

Of those, 19 were in Greater Cincinnati. Thirteen of that group came from outside the area.

Complete data is lacking on 22 others.

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