



**Ambulatory  
Surgery Centers**

## Tips for a successful hire in your ASC

**T**he temporary staffing agency you use for your ASC assures you it conducts thorough background checks. You decide to hire the accounts receivable clerk sent from the agency. Your prehire background check reveals the clerk spent time in prison for embezzlement. You escort the clerk out the door.

Most managers have some kind of horror story about a seemingly good hire gone bad. Hiring in an ASC is often challenging. The ASC administrator may double as the human resource (HR) manager, or the HR resource may be off-site and not readily available.

"You don't necessarily have a lot of backup," says Lisa Cooper, RN, BSN, CNOR, chief executive officer of El Camino Surgery Center in Mountain View, California. How can you enhance your chances of making a smart hire? Heed this advice from the experts.

### Common mistakes

The most common mistake managers make is talking first and too much, says Susie Hardin, vice president of human resources for Symbion in Nashville, Tennessee. "People explain the company and job up front, then ask the candidate about themselves, but you've already given them the answers. It's better to let the candidate speak first."

Another common mistake is basing a decision to hire on a person's credentials or past jobs, assuming he or she will know the clinical procedures performed in the ASC. Hardin suggests asking candidates to explain the steps of a procedure rather than asking for a yes or no as to whether they know how to do it.

Ann Bures, RN, MA, CHCR, past president of the National Association of Health Care Recruiters (NAHCR), reminds managers they need to understand their work environment and work group dynamics. "What kind of person will fit with the group? If you have an assertive group, can a candidate stand up to that?" Bures suggests asking the candidate, "How do you introduce yourself to a new work group?" and "Describe a time when you encountered a difficult situation with a coworker."

Honesty is a 2-way street between the manager and the candidate.

"Be clear about the negatives, too, because every place has good and bad," says Cooper. "If there will be a lot of overtime, don't hide it; be upfront about it." Otherwise, the staff member may leave, putting you back where you started.

### Overlooked but vital

"I've seen it over and over again," says Hardin. "Hiring managers don't check references. So many problems could have been prevented if only a thorough reference check was done."

Hardin recommends using only supervisors, not coworkers, for references and remembering that if the candidate gives you the name, chances are the reference will be positive. She calls the candidate's immediate supervisor first because he or she will frequently provide more information than the human resources department, which often gives only dates of employment.

Even limited information can be helpful, particularly when evaluating the length of employment listed on the resume, especially for those candidates who list only years. For example, a nurse lists her tenure at a previous job as 2005-2007, implying she was

employed for 2 years. However, further research reveals she started in December 2005 and left in January 2007, closer to 1 year and half the experience, a significant difference.

Cooper is particularly interested in the tenure of candidates for jobs in lower salary brackets. "Those positions are a little easier to fill, so if they are moving around, it likely means they are job hopping."

With these candidates, Cooper also focuses more on the details of getting to work on time because people with lower incomes often have fewer resources to fall back on.

### **Screening for secrets**

Criminal background checks and drug screens have become routine in job hiring. An offer of employment is made contingent on the results of screening, background checks, and reference checks.

It's not unusual for these checks to come back positive. Hardin estimates that about 25% reveal misdemeanors such as possession of marijuana, writing bad checks, reckless driving, driving without a license, and driving under the influence (DUI) without injury to another person. Felonies such as rape or burglary are "few and far between."

Cooper counsels manager to be careful when hiring a company to conduct background checks. She recommends contacting local hospitals and major businesses to obtain recommendations. "I would not just look on the Internet," she says. Cooper adds that managers should also evaluate the company a staffing agency uses for checks to ensure it's doing a good job.

How does a history of drug use or a criminal record factor into the hiring decision? Hardin recommends considering if it was a misdemeanor, how long ago it occurred, how old the person was at the time of the infraction, and whether it was an isolated incident or part of a pattern. "Consistency is very important, in case you are ever challenged in court."

Another factor is how forthcoming the candidate is. During the interview Cooper likes to ask, "We run an extensive background check. Is there anything you'd like to tell me before we do that?"

"If they don't say anything, and something comes up on the check, that's probably reason enough not to hire them," she says.

### **Take time now, not later**

Making the right hire takes time. It's not easy being patient when you're faced with open positions.

"People get desperate," says Cooper, "they make a quick decision and don't wait until the fit is right." But not taking time during the hiring process can cause problems down the road and more time on the manager's part.

To avoid the hasty hire, "managers must be prepared," says Bures. She recommends a structured approach, including reviewing the application, having a set of probing questions, and using a questionnaire related to ambulatory surgery.

Bures uses the Healthcare Selection Inventory (HSI) from TestSource, a company in Grand Rapids, Michigan, that specializes in assessment and retention in health care (<http://testsource.com>). The HSI Feedback Report provides an overview of the candidate's potential for success on the job and includes three scales: Overall Performance Index, Retention Index, and Service Excellence Index. The tool takes a candidate about 20 to 30 minutes to complete and can be done before the interview. Similar tools are available from other companies.

Bures credits the inventory, face-to-face interview, and time in the OR shadowing another employee as a combination that's worked well for her. She prepares the staff with questions they can ask the candidate during the shadowing experience. Shadowing helps ensure a good fit and gives peers a chance to ask questions.

### **Partnership and processes**

Bures recommends working closely with your HR contact to ensure an efficient, effective interview process. That will help save time and lessen the chances of making a poor decision.

After employees have been on the job for about a month, Hardin likes to ask

them if the job turned out to be what they expected and if it matched with what they heard in the interview. That step will help fine-tune your hiring process.

You have to be an investigator, a critical thinker, and a good listener to match the right person to the right job. It can be a challenge, but the reward is a satisfied, long-term employee. ❖

—Cynthia Saver, RN, MS

*Cynthia Saver is a freelance writer in Columbia, Maryland.*

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## **More questions to hire by**

Most of these interview questions fall into “behavioral interviewing,” a technique predicated on the idea that a person’s past performance indicates future performance. It emphasizes questions that elicit descriptions of specific behaviors in response to various situations.

1. What do you want from a job and a company?
2. Why did you leave your previous position?

Susie Hardin of Symbion, Nashville, Tennessee, says to match the answer against the resume. “If they say it was for more money, but there’s a gap in employment, they didn’t leave for more money.”

3. Tell me about a time you had a physician throw an instrument or engage in another act of conflict.

“You need to ask about how they handle nurse-surgeon friction,” says Ann Bures, RN, MA, CHCR, past president of the National Association of Health Care Recruiters.

4. Describe your personality to me. “Usually they’ll say they are a ‘people person,’” says Hardin. “But I’ve had people tell me they were selfish, opinionated, or self-centered.” She recommends doing this before you share what kind of employee you are seeking.
5. What would your current manager say about you? How would he or she describe you as far as your work ethic and reliability?
6. Describe some of the typical aspects of your day.

“This tells you about their abilities to set priorities and delegate,” says Bures.