Things to Remember During Faculty Recruitment Season
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Although February may be a down month in some ways, I think it is an exciting time for academic general internal medicine (GIM) divisions. One reason is that winter is a common time for candidates and divisions to negotiate positions and make decisions about the future.

The recruitment process can be stressful for both candidates and those responsible for hiring them. However, it is exhilarating as well, as one gets to know many new people through the process and compare how things are done at different places. I think the interviewing process is particularly helpful for candidates because the process of interviewing typically helps them to clarify what they really want in a position.

Over the years I have spoken with many individuals seeking new positions. Sometimes I am hoping to hire an individual into our division, and sometimes I give advice to a candidate as an outside advisor. One item that frequently needs more discussion is mentorship of the candidate in the new position. I have come to believe that having engaged mentorship is one of the most important predictors of success and happiness in a new position. If I cannot see who would mentor an individual, then I am much less enthusiastic about the recruitment, no matter how well qualified the candidate is. I now typically include a mentorship plan in offer letters I write. Usually, I propose in the letter a mentoring committee, including a chair of the committee. It is not that I think that everything must be done by committee, but it is often difficult to meet a junior faculty member’s mentoring needs with a single individual. Having two to three faculty members named as mentors in the letter increases the number of individuals (in addition to the chief) who feel especially vested in the success of the new faculty member.

I am sometimes asked what other resources prospective faculty members should consider requesting during negotiations. Of course, this depends greatly on the responsibilities of the particular position. Many GIM faculty are appointed as clinician-educators. Faculty holding these positions will often have clinical responsibilities (outpatient and/or inpatient) for 50% to 80% of their effort, with the remaining effort allocated to specific educational responsibilities. It is important that the allocation of time/effort be specified in the offer letter to avoid confusion later. I advise clinician-educator faculty also to inquire about support for any educational roles. For example, if you are to become the director of a particular course, you need to know about administrative support for the course. You do not want to be the one personally e-mailing dozens of trainees about their schedules. In addition, clinician-educator faculty may wish to negotiate for additional development opportunities as a faculty member, depending on one’s background. These opportunities might include learning about the principles of curriculum development and implementation, assessment of learners, and giving feedback. The institution may offer such opportunities or one could ask for an external opportunity to be included in the offer, such as the SGIM TEACH program. (See more information at www.sgim.org/go/TEACH.)

Prospective faculty who expect to develop externally funded research programs should also receive resources to support their start-up phase. One resource will be substantial protected time, which is often 75% to 80% for those who expect to secure federal funding for their research. The other resources needed would be customized to the specific research planned but should include enough support to gather and analyze pilot data and develop relationships to facilitate the research to be undertaken. These days, NIH support is challenging to obtain, so it is better if the support is sufficient for what may be several rounds of applications. I also think it is good if the offer letter specifies whether the support can be held over for future years if not spent in the initial year or two. Research-intensive prospective faculty should seek specific advice from their mentors about the type and amount of support. Let me offer here a word of hope. Despite the tight funding environment, it is still possible to secure federal and/or foundation support as a new investigator. It takes hard work, committed mentorship, and some start-up resources, but it can be done. I hope that those who pursue a research-intensive pathway do not become discouraged.

Some institutions, my own included, have a specific faculty track for more clinically oriented individuals.
als. These individuals may not be engaged primarily in medical education work, although they usually teach for a part of their effort. Given their high degree of clinical effort, they sometimes proceed along an administrative pathway, conducting quality improvement work and eventually becoming medical directors for various clinical operations. If you are considering such a position, it is worthwhile to understand in advance whether promotion can occur with that job description and what the criteria are. Having advanced knowledge of the SGIM Quality Portfolio components (http://www.sgim.org/file%20library/aclgim/tools%20and%20resources/qualityportfoliogram.pdf) may be useful. Since all faculty require mentorship, a mentor should still ideally be identified prior to accepting the position. Individuals who embark on this career pathway may wish to negotiate for resources to assist with quality improvement work and may wish to consider training in this area. Individuals embarking on this career pathway may wish to negotiate for attendance at courses offered by SGIM or ACLGIM, such as the Academic Hospitalist Academy (co-sponsored by SGIM/ACLGIM and the Society of Hospital Medicine) or others. I suggest having specific language in the offer letter to provide support for attendance at one or more such courses within the first couple years of being on the faculty.

In the end, one of the most important things that I seek in a prospective faculty member is fit within our division. I look for whether they will fit with our culture and potentially cultivate productive relationships with our existing faculty. This is the kind of thing that is assessed at dinner or other informal recruitment activities. One of the most gratifying parts of my time as division chief has been to pull together a group of faculty who support each other and who celebrate the successes of their peers. This benefits the institution as well as the faculty members by helping to lead to a positive sense of engagement. Getting a sense of the milieu of the division you are considering can be just as important as having all the details covered in the offer letter.