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Doctors find area's ad on the Web 'Help Wanted' in Southwest Ohio

By Tim Bonfield
Enquirer staff writer

A Web-based effort to recruit more doctors to Cincinnati hasn't yet brought any new doctors to town, but it has attracted much more interest than organizers expected.

In its first three months, the www.CincinnatiMDjobs.com Web site, launched by the Health Improvement Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati, has posted 66 job openings that have attracted more than 26,000 hits and more than 400 potential matches from physicians willing to consider moving to the region.

At least six doctors are being interviewed.

All of those numbers eclipse what the organizers projected for all of 2005, said Lynn Olman, president of the Greater Cincinnati Health Council, one of the organizations that helped launch the Web site.

"This thing is exceeding our wildest expectations. This shows that there is interest in Southwest Ohio," Olman said.

Doctors who log onto the Web site can learn about more than job openings. They also can learn about Cincinnati real estate, arts, sports and other topics through information supplied by the Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce.

Cincinnati health leaders have been saying since May 2003 that the area suffers a shortage of physicians compared to other Midwestern cities, even though the overall number of doctors in the area has been growing.

Experts argue about why local practices struggle to recruit doctors, including:

- The widely held view among doctors that they get lower-than-average reimbursement in this area while facing higher-than-average malpractice fees.
- Perceptions that the area is too conservative politically, too boring, or racially unfriendly.

Experts also disagree about the potential patient impact of the physician supply. While physician and hospital groups warn that the quality of care could suffer, several patient satisfaction surveys, including one conducted in January by the Enquirer, have reported that most people say they can see a good physician when they need one.

Still, a study conducted by a task force of hospital and business groups reports that 14 specialties are in short supply in Greater Cincinnati when compared to Columbus, Indianapolis and several other Midwest cities. Some say patients will start feeling those shortages in years to come, especially as baby boomers age their way into higher health needs.

To catch up to other cities, the area needs to attract about 500 more doctors, Olman said.

IN SHORT SUPPLY

A 2003 study by Greater Cincinnati health and business groups reported that 14 of 33 physician specialties are in significantly lower supply in this region when compared to Columbus, Dayton, Indianapolis, Lexington, Louisville, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Nashville, Pittsburgh and St. Louis. The specialties:

- Anatomical/clinical pathology
- Anesthesiology
- Cardiovascular disease
- Colon and rectal surgery
- Diagnostic radiology
- Gastroenterology
- General surgery
- Neurological surgery
- Neurology
- Ophthalmology
- Orthopedic surgery
- Pulmonary disease
- Radiation oncology
- Thoracic surgery

The original, modest goal had been to attract 100 new doctors within four years. With such strong early interest in the Web site, that goal might be met sooner than expected, Olman said.

Internal Medicine Associates of Northern Kentucky, a 12-doctor group, has already started using the Web site to hunt for prospects.

"We're looking for a pulmonologist and just last night I pulled up three people that I plan to call that otherwise I would never have heard about," says Dan Cole, chief operating officer for the group.

Typical head-hunting services would charge \$10,000 to \$40,000 per doctor they help recruit, which Cole said his group cannot afford. But this service is free to doctor groups.

"I think this is going to be great for Cincinnati," he said.

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