Interview Questions

Questions to Ask Leadership:

How long have you been in this position?

What are your current projects for the Division/Department?

What are your future plans for the Division/Department?

Do you anticipate a change in leadership anytime soon?

Tell me about career development opportunities and mentoring for junior faculty.

Talk a little about promotion and how that process is perceived by the current faculty.

What do you hear most often from your faculty? The good and the bad.

Is there a high faculty turnover rate? Why or why not?

How would people describe your leadership style?

Who are the key clinical faculty? Are they regionally or nationally known?

Who are the key research faculty? Are they well-funded?

Who’s the last person you hired and why? Can I talk to that person?

Who’s the last person that left the Division/Department and why?

What is the mission of the Division/Department? How are the clinical and academic missions balanced?

What do you see as my specific role? This can be asked during a first visit but probably best to ask this during a second visit when you start getting into the specific details of a potential job. As an aside, everything is negotiable. You just have to decide what’s most important to you and pick your battles.

- These questions generally work for the Fellowship Program Director or any senior faculty member that is in charge of something (head of research development; clinical operations director; etc).

Questions to ask Faculty:

Describe the faculty culture.

Do handoffs happen when faculty members switch services and are they adequate?

Who covers for you if you're sick?

Do researchers within the Division collaborate? Are there group research meetings?

Is there major beef between the clinicians and the researchers or do people generally get along?

Do you feel like your voice is heard? Do you have autonomy?

If something needed to change, could you cut through the red tape to make it happen? Would your Division Chief support you?

Can you give an example of a recent change?

What would you like to change?

Describe the specific conferences (weekly journal club versus monthly).

Do faculty present in conference or fellows only?

What's the attendance rate typically of these various conferences?

Are there areas that the Division is particularly strong or weak in (glomerulonephritis, pathology, transplant/immunology, ethics/palliative care, renal imaging, interventional, home dialysis, onco-nephrology, acid/base, electrolyte disorders, etc)?

How is the Division addressing any weakness?

Do most fellows go into private practice or academics when they graduate?

Do nephrology faculty work well with other services (medicine, surgery)? This would also include ancillary services.

What is the relationship between faculty and mid-levels?

Who does biopsies? Are reads done in-house or sent out?

Who puts in lines?

What is the attending call schedule like (including weeknights and weekends)?

What hospitals are covered and where are they?

What is the clinic schedule? Who determines it?

Is there a population missing or over-represented (such as very few OB cases because there's a private hospital down the road known for excellent women's health)?

- Of note, avoid saying "Well, at Duke, this is how we do X…" or anything similar unless you are specifically asked and even then, be careful. Just because something is done differently than what you're used to, doesn't mean it's wrong.

- Make sure you meet with Human Resources on your second visit to go over benefits, insurance, etc. On your second visit, also ask faculty/staff about resources – funding for conferences, laptop, professional society memberships, start-up lab funds, etc.

General Tips:

- Ask questions that will answer two big questions for you: Can I work here? Can I live here? Focusing solely on salary and compensation will lead you down the wrong path.

- Don't be surprised if the employer asks for a phone interview first before you can schedule a site visit. It happens frequently.

- Interviews typically are 1– 2 days. You want to meet as many faculty, staff, fellows, etc as possible to get a good feel for the place.

- Be prepared to give a talk (typically 45-50 min with then questions afterwards). That means a well-researched and well-rehearsed talk. You should be an expert on your topic and know your talk/slides extremely well. Start preparing for this early and you'll be fine.

- Actually listen to the interviewer's response to your questions so you can ask follow-up questions.

- Expect a few questions from interviewers like: Why are you interested in our program? What are your career plans? Tell me about your current project. Do you any questions for me? Practice your answers. Also have an elevator pitch ready – a very short and well-rehearsed summary of who you are, what you want, and what you've doing/done to get there.

- Get a sleek-looking briefcase or professional folder to carry around with you during the interview. It matters. It will also allow you to take notes – if you interview at several places, they will all start to blur together by the end so take notes.

- Start off with a solid handshake and smile. Compliments go a long way ("Thanks for having me. It's great to be hear.")

- Send a thank you email soon afterwards. Make sure they are personalized

- Be honest. That goes for what you're looking for as well as for what you can deliver. If pushed for a decision before you're ready, you can acknowledge that you have other interviews and that you are doing your due diligence to make the best possible decision. At the same time, realize the employer is probably looking at several candidates at once for the same position.

- Fake it until you make it. You're already awesome, though, so it's all good.

Adapted from the experiences of former Duke fellow Melissa Makar, question handout from Drs. Jeffrey Berns and Stuart Linas (2014, University of Pennsylvania), and "When to do What in your Job Search" by PracticeLink, 2013.