

## **Negotiating for your first job as an academic neuro-ophthalmologist.**

The first step in negotiating for a job is getting an interview! Be sure to utilize your residency and fellowship mentors and other contacts in finding out about available positions, securing interviews and reviewing job offers. Many jobs are found by word of mouth rather than listings on the AAO or AUPO websites. AAO sub-specialty days are also a great way to network. Having at least two offers to compare is helpful in the negotiation process.

Some aspects of the offer are non-negotiable and relatively standard. These include benefits such as medical, dental and life insurance, disability coverage and retirement benefits. While you may not be able to negotiate them, it is a good idea to know what is offered when weighing your job options.

The key components to consider are money and time.

Let's talk money. There are several aspects to your salary which are negotiable. First there is the base salary. You can try to ask for a higher base, but occasionally this is fixed within a department or institution. Be sure to ask about how long the base salary is guaranteed – sometimes your salary will change to production-based after a specific amount of time. You can request to lengthen the number of years the base salary is guaranteed. Also ask about salary increases with inflation which may be included in the future. Aside from the base salary, there are incentives, which usually start after you have been on staff for a period of time. Ask about the requirements to meet incentive in the department and how it is distributed to find out the possibility of you participating. Some departments will subsidize an incentive for the first couple of years to boost your salary above the base, but realize your salary will then drop after that time if you don't qualify for the incentive pool. Other money details to consider are a signing bonus, which can vary quite widely from department to department, and moving expenses. Additionally it's good to find out what expenses are covered by the department (AAO/AAN dues, DEA, state license etc.), if there are any available start-up research funds, and what kind of academic allowance is given to faculty members to cover travel expenses for meetings, etc. The amount of vacation and time off for conferences is also good to find out.

However, money isn't everything. You can be pretty miserable in a high paying position with unrealistic expectations in clinical and research productivity, lack of support, etc. So let's review the time aspect of the offer. Many departments have different academic tracks – the clinician-scientist and the clinician-educator tracks, or something similar to that. Which track you choose will guide how you divide your time between clinic, research and education and will also be important when you come up for promotion. Every department is different in what is expected in each track and so it is essential to review that. Regardless of your track, all academic departments will expect clinical work, research and teaching. The percentage of time (number of half days/week) spent in clinic is negotiable. Also important is establishing your call responsibilities and the number of clinical sites at which you are expected to practice. You don't want to be surprised later on in hearing you have to travel 2 hours each way to a satellite office once a week. Be clear in whether you want to staff resident clinics, work at the VA/satellites, etc. Additionally, make sure the department is aware of your clinical interests, especially if you want to participate in surgical care as there is often overlap with pediatrics, oculoplastics and

comprehensive and you don't want to have to fight for cases. In academics, research is expected whether you are a clinician-scientist or clinician-educator. Ask about dedicated research time and funding/administrative support. How many papers are you expected to publish? While you are focused on securing your first job, promotion will be in your future. Some departments give unlimited time to be promoted while others are "up-or-out" institutions. This means that you are given a certain number of years to be promoted to the next rank, or you are required to leave the institution. In conjunction with this is a restrictive covenant, limiting your ability to practice outside the university if you leave the position. Not all restrictive covenants are enforceable. Additionally, the distance and time of the covenant may be negotiable.

I have reviewed most aspects of an academic offer letter. Realize that nearly everything is negotiable – you won't know if you can get a higher salary unless you ask, but I would suggest only trying to negotiate the points that are really important to you. You don't want to get caught up in all the nitty-gritty details which have little impact on your position and put yourself at risk for losing the job or giving yourself a reputation as difficult even before you start. But keep in mind, as an academic neuro-ophthalmologist, you are in high demand and have significant power in the negotiation process.

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