

**Q: Why do many fellows dread deciding this next step in their careers?**

**A:** “Many people are afraid of being rejected, taken advantage of, or coming across as greedy, aggressive and uncooperative,” says Angela Wang, M.D., staff physician at Scripps Clinic Medical Group in La Jolla, California, who spent nearly 20 years in academic medicine at the University of California, San Francisco and UC San Diego.

But fear doesn't have to be a negative emotion, if you can use it as an incentive to be diligent, methodical and determined throughout the negotiation process, explains Dr. Wang, who also serves as editor of Career Talk on the ATS Web site.\*

**Q: How should I prepare for contract negotiation?**

**A:** The key is to be informed and prepared. All applicants should identify the issues that need to be addressed in advance. “We all possess assets (skills, resources) or needs (geographic location, job for spouse) that strengthen or weaken our bargaining position,” says Dr. Wang.

**Q: If I pursue an academic career, can provisions of my contract help ensure my success?**

**A:** Those applying for academic positions should ensure that their contracts allow adequate time to perform scholarly activities, according to Joshua Benditt, M.D., professor of medicine at the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle. “The success of a clinician-educator will depend heavily on clinical activities, excellence in teaching and scholarly productivity—publications, course development and syllabus materials,” he explains. “Scholarly activity is time-consuming and you have to make sure there is sufficient protected time to succeed.”

**Q: How much time exactly?**

**A:** Dr. Benditt estimates about 25 percent minimum, although he notes physicians involved in clinical research would need more.

**Q: Is the time requirement different for physician-scientists?**

**A:** For a junior faculty member struggling to set up a new laboratory and become productive, says Dr. Wang, this can mean devoting between 80 to 100 percent of time to research during the first two years. If an employer balks at that, Dr. Wang suggests negotiating a contract that allows you to ease into clinical or administrative responsibilities over the first year or two. Either way, “your contract should clearly specify how much time you are expected to spend on all duties,” she says.

**Q: What are some of the keys to negotiating a fair contract to work in a group practice?**

**A:** Frazer Wadenstorer, M.D., a senior physician at Pulmonary Associates in Flint, Michigan, suggests applicants be wary of clauses that allow for termination without cause and those that prohibit physicians from working for competitors for up to a year after their contract expires. Some contracts, he adds, will also include automatic renewal clauses.

Physicians entering private practice should also be sensitive to the differences between salaried and contract positions, he notes. “This could have an enormous impact on both wages and benefits.”

**Q: I know that academic medicine pays less than private practice. Is there room to negotiate to close the gap?**

**A:** Fellows and trainees interested in pursuing the clinician-educator track should be aware that salaries are generally set within a range by institutions, says Dr. Benditt. As a result, he suggests not expending excess energy on something that cannot be altered in a major way.

Dr. Wang concurs. Remember, you are negotiating a package and need to insure that you have adequate resources for success, including research, technical and administrative support. Junior faculty pursuing the physician-scientist track should also make sure they understand their salary sources and requirements, adds Dr. Wang. Know when you are expected to become fully self-supporting. Also, be aware of how an institution handles issues like consulting and intellectual property rights.

**Q: I'm negotiating with the institution where I completed my fellowship. Does this change the dynamic of the negotiations?**

**A:** Whoever you are negotiating with, the ATS experts agree, it is important to be honest and respectful, and to avoid personalizing issues. There is a good chance that you will interact with these individuals again, either as a colleague, or as someone negotiating a future contract.

“No one's memory is perfect,” says Dr. Wang. “Take notes, write letters or e-mails reviewing recent conversations or important details. Get everything in writing. This isn't an issue of trust, but of making sure that there are no misunderstandings.”

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**Q:** Is there an advantage to joining the faculty at the institution where I did my fellowship?

**A:** “Staying on faculty happens frequently, since it many times feels more comfortable and safe,” said Jonathan Parsons, M.D., who joined the faculty at Ohio State

University Medical Center last year after completing his training there. “It is absolutely critical that you understand your job description is going to be and you have an idea of what niche you might fit into within your division.”

Another advantage you may have is knowing firsthand how successful the division has been in nurturing junior faculty. “Your mentor should be able to help you substantially in this process,” said Dr. Parsons, who credits his program director and ATS member John Mastronarde, M.D., with guiding him through the negotiation process. ■