

## REGULAR

# ANAESTHETISTS IN TRAINING

## TIPS FOR JOB INTERVIEWS

Dr Vida Viliunas (FANZCA) is a specialist anaesthetist currently working in both public and private practice in Canberra. She is also an examiner for the final fellowship exam. In this issue, Vida offers some advice to help GASACT members prepare for provisional fellow or junior consultant job interviews.

Got a job interview coming up? Many of us are uncomfortable with selling ourselves or walking into a room full of people ready to ask questions for which we feel unprepared. The solution is to learn and develop some skills.

### AIM

The aim is to present yourself effectively at an interview to get the job you want.

In order to be chosen, you should distinguish yourself from the other applicants:

- What has been your path to date?
- What are your special interests?
- What have you done to advance those interests?
- Reflect (yes, you have to) on your motivations, choices, goals and planned trajectory.

The harder you work, the luckier you get. Solid preparation will also contribute to managing the stress of an unfamiliar, high-stakes situation.

### PREPARATION

- Practice being interviewed and telling your story.

- Do some research—on the facility, its culture, on the head of department and on the staff and their research or publications. Use multiple sources: check facility websites and Google the staff or other applicants.
- Ask others about their interview experiences and techniques.
- If you can discuss the job with the previous employee, all the better. With reference to this, prepare your approach to the potential questions (see below).
- Ensure that you know the job description—check whether there are any options for you to choose (e.g. NICU/PICU/retrieval/rural service).
- This article will give you a sample of interviewers' favourite questions—an important part of preparation is anticipating questions and developing responses that will distinguish you from the other applicants.
- Update your CV, choose your referees carefully, update them if necessary (look for referee 'gaps') and notify them. Bring a couple of extra copies of your CV to the interview.
- Just like a first impression, your CV has about ten seconds to make a visual impression: select layout to ensure visual clarity, be a ruthless editor and use a covering letter to match your skills now with the job description. CV preparation is a subject for another article.

### COMMUNICATION

#### Delivery and deportment

- Focus on the speaker. Paying attention will allay your anxiety. Listening is not just waiting for your turn to talk.
- Go in well rested and alert. Do not make excuses—don't tell them you are tired and emotional or have just come from a big night out. Anaesthetists are familiar with working long hours.
- Be formal (that does not mean unfriendly). Wear a businesslike outfit, watch your body language (sit up straight and have a firm handshake), watch fillers (meaningful silence is better than saying "um" or "ah") and turn your phone off.
- Be succinct, then be quiet and wait for the next question. It is probably better to let the interview panellists make the jokes and respond with polite acknowledgement.

#### There is only one opportunity for a first impression—that happens in the first few seconds of an encounter

- Be punctual—early is better.
- Be respectful (but not intimidated or obsequious), honest, direct and to the point (a bit like the exam). If the question is unclear, ask for it to be rephrased.
- Do not lie.
- Weave your past achievements into your story. Candidates are evaluated on past

performance being a predictor of future contribution.

- Soft skills being tested include your work ethic, communication, likeability and organisational 'fit', time management and prioritisation, and ability to perform under pressure (the story within the story of the interview).
- Being on the spot in an interview is hard. If you have prepared well, you still might have to use a phrase like "I would need some time to think about that". Don't be afraid to pause and think.
- Think about this: unless the interviewers have already made up their minds, they want to know that their search is over; they want it to be you... help them make it so.

## CONTENT

- What is your story? What is your career trajectory? Broad brush areas include your background (academic and a bit of extracurricular or volunteer), qualifications, experience and reasons for applying.
- Think about your aptitude, your particular passions, initiatives and motivations.
- Just as you have an anaesthesia plan for a patient, you should develop a plan for your career. Tailor your story to the job for which you are applying: match your special skills and distinguishing contributions to the needs of the prospective employer.

## RESEARCH

There are a gazillion websites about job interview skills—among them:

- [http://www.impactfactory.com/gate/new\\_job\\_interview\\_skills\\_hints\\_and\\_tips/fungate\\_174-1103-91240.html](http://www.impactfactory.com/gate/new_job_interview_skills_hints_and_tips/fungate_174-1103-91240.html)
- <http://careers.theguardian.com/careers-blog/star-technique-competency-based-interview>
- <http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/intervw.htm>.

## QUESTIONS

Here are some interviewer questions that you can use to prepare some possible responses.

- If you could work anywhere in the world, where would it be?
- Why do you want to be an anaesthetist?
- Walk us through your CV. (Do not read through it—highlight the compelling features and match your strengths to the job description.)
- What will be the main differences between your last job and this one?
- What did you hate about your last job?
- What are your greatest weaknesses?
- How do you handle stress/crisis/failure/success/misconduct/conflict/moral dilemmas/conflicting religious beliefs? (Make sure that your response is consistent with your interview performance. Having an example of a stressful situation and how you have dealt with it might be useful.)
- What additional training would you like to undertake in the short or long term?
- Where do you plan to be in X years?
- If you could have a superpower, what would it be?
- Non-work questions: How would you solve Sydney's traffic problem?
- What questions do YOU have for the panel? (Beyond "When will you let me know?")
- What do you learn from your mistakes? (For example, persistence, the value of learning from any outcome or that there is rarely only one way to achieve X.)

Skills-related questions can be found at <http://bit.ly/1fxu5xA>.

## Questions for you to ask them

- I have the job description—what are your hopes for an outstanding performance?

- Having spoken with X (outgoing job holder), they had hoped to achieve Y. Can I do Y or try Z?
- My particular X (research/academic/workplace/systems) interests are Y; my research on this institution/department seems to indicate that that might be possible here.
- Elaborate on a particular strength if you think it has not been showcased during the interview.

## Questions not to ask or subjects best left alone

- When can I take time off?
- Can I arrange my own roster?
- Do not 'badmouth' previous positions or people (it's a small world).
- Do not dwell on personal problems, politics, religion or race.

## Illegal questions

There are many topics that are off limits—but we all know it happens: age and family status (and intentions), for example.

You can be truthful, but vague (address the question generally, without answering): "My X is not an issue for my performance in this job", "I will be able to perform all duties that the job entails" or "My X (sex/religion/pregnancy) will not interfere with my ability to do the job".

Being prepared is probably better than being outraged during the interview.

## FOLLOW-UP

Consider sending a thank you email even if you don't get the job. It's a small world and there may be a second round of interviews.

Use this as an opportunity to highlight what special skills you would bring to the job.

Best wishes to you all!