

Five Important Tips for Physician CVs

If you are a licensed and board certified physician, you are in the enviable position of having credentials that mostly speak for themselves. But that doesn't mean you can afford to have a sloppy or thrown together physician curriculum vitae (CV). As with many things in life, CVs are often judged by their appearance first. That is why it is important that, as a resident or physician, your CV be visually appealing, easy to scan, and logically assembled.

Below are five important tips for your CV that will ensure that it gets and keeps the interest of prospective physician employers.

1) Are dates the first things you see? They shouldn't be!

While dates are important, you don't want them to be the main focus point on your CV. A layout that puts dates before or on top of titles and degrees is not only visually unappealing, but it forces the reader to dig for the most pertinent information.

There are four key elements to any listing in the Education, Postgraduate Training, or Work Experience sections of a resident or physician CV: 1) Position or degree, 2) name of organization, 3) location of organization, and 4) the dates of your tenure. Of these four, the position and name of the organization are the most important.

Therefore, of the two examples below, B is a much better format than A.

Example A:

1999-2003, St. Francis Hospital, Queens, NY, Internal Medicine Resident

Example B:

Internal Medicine Resident, 1993 - 2003
St. Francis Hospital, Queens, NY

Bolding your position or degree makes that information stand out even more, which a busy employer will appreciate.

The rule about dates also applies to categories such as Memberships, Honors/Awards, or Volunteer Activities. Take the example below:

1993-2005, Member, American Medical Association 1994-2005, Member, American Academy of Pediatrics 1992-2003, Member, Wisconsin Medical Association

Having so many dates on the left is distracting. Here is a much better approach:

American Medical Association, 1993-2005
American Academy of Pediatrics, 1994-2005 Wisconsin Medical Association, 1992-2003
As a general rule, the most substantive information should be the most prominent.

2) Is your timeline easy to follow?

A physician employer reviewing your CV for the first time should be able to determine the progression of everything you've done from your undergraduate training to medical school to residency to the present in 30 seconds or less. The best way to ensure this is to list everything in reverse chronological order this applies to the categories as well as the items within each category. If you have been practicing medicine for a while, then your Work Experience should be at the top, followed by your Residency/Fellowship Training, followed by your Education. If you are at an early point in your career as a physician and feel that you'd benefit from highlighting your education/training above your current work experience, it is OK to put that category first, as long as your work experience doesn't follow far behind.

The main thing to avoid is categorizing your experience in a way that makes it difficult to follow chronologically. For example, if you spent a few years after your residency pursuing research before joining a medical practice, don't bury that information on the second page. It is fine to put it in its own "Research" category, but it should be placed accordingly within the timeline on your CV.

3) Is your CV two pages or less?

Traditionally, resident and physician CVs are lengthy and include all types of information beyond education, training, and employment.

Physician CVs also list publications, presentations, CME activities, volunteer work, community lectures, and other relevant professional activities. While it is a good idea to keep an updated, comprehensive CV on hand, for the purpose of your job search, you want an abbreviated version that is two pages or less (unless you are looking for an academic position).

If you have a lengthy CV, the best way to condense it is to create a separate addendum containing detailed information about your research projects, publications, abstracts, etc. This addendum can be provided upon request to interested employers.

You still should mention these things on your abbreviated CV, but summarize them in a few bullet points or a brief paragraph. For example, you might consider the following:

Publications/Presentations/Research*

Authored 15 articles in published in medical journals including The New England Journal of Medicine and the Internal Medicine Journal. Also published over 25 abstracts. Participated in several important research projects focusing primarily on diabetes treatment and prevention.

*Full listing of publications and research projects available upon request.

4) Is the overall appearance easy on the eyes?

A CV that's appealing to the eye is not necessarily the same thing as a CV that's eye-catching. Of course you want to get noticed, but many people take the notion of eye-catching too far. Unusual fonts, strange symbols, or tricky formats will only aggravate the busy person who is trying to quickly assess your qualifications.

Make sure to use a traditional font such as Times New Roman or Garamond.

Since these fonts are what most people are accustomed to reading on a daily basis, they won't have trouble adjusting to a new one. Text should be either 11 or 12 point font, not bigger or smaller (excluding category headings).

Also make sure you use white space to adequately separate each item in your CV. This will make it easy to scan and pick out information. A laundry list is hard on the eyes, and it also can obscure important information.

Finally, your headings should be clear and stand out from the other text in your resume, so that it is easy to pick out each category.

5) Is your formatting consistent?

Before you send off your CV to a physician employer, do a quick check to make sure that your formatting is consistent. If you bold your job titles, then you should also bold your degrees. If you put a colon after some of your headings, it should be after all of them. If you use a dash between some dates, make sure you don't write the word "to" between others.

Although these details may seem minor, inconsistent formatting makes your CV seem sloppy. That is not the first impression you want to give to a prospective physician employer. It's always a good idea to get a second pair of eyes on your CV before sending it off. If you've been working on it a while, or you've had the same format for ages, you might be missing something that is glaringly obvious to someone else. The best person to look at your CV is someone who is unfamiliar with your career history. Ask this person if anything is unclear or if they have any questions about what is on the page.

Putting in a few extra minutes to make sure your CV looks impressive will save you a lot of time down the road because you will find a great job that much sooner. By following the five tips above, you can feel confident that you are submitting a polished and appealing document to prospective employers.