Iowa practices get recruiting help from state medical society

The Iowa Medical Society Center for Physician Recruitment promotes Iowa as a great place to live and work. The state ranks 41st in physician supply.


The Iowa Medical Society recently launched what appears to be a first-of-its-kind initiative by a state medical society to help its members recruit new physicians.

Telling potential recruits about the benefits of practicing in the Hawkeye State is the aim of the medical society's Center for Physician Recruitment. The effort, which started in April, is packaged under the slogan, "Iowa: A Practice Worth Living," and features a website, coffee-table sized booklet and videos of Iowa doctors from various specialties talking about why they enjoy working and living in the state.

Among the benefits of practicing in Iowa that the program touts: low medical liability insurance rates, a highly insured population, low crime rates, friendly communities and strong public schools.

"We're the convention and visitors bureau for Iowa medicine," said Mike Abrams, the medical society's executive vice president. "We're talking about why Iowa's such a fantastic place to have a medical career. Medical societies have traditionally done a great job about lamenting the state of things in their state. "What the Iowa Medical Society Center for Physician Recruitment is trying to do is turn that on its head. There are some marvelous things in our state, and we want to be about the business of explaining and promoting that."

For years, Iowa physicians have told the medical society that difficulty recruiting new doctors to their practices is a top concern. Doctors in the state must contend with Medicare pay rates that are second-lowest in the country, and attracting physicians to work in the rural plains of Iowa when the coasts call can be a challenge.

The state faces a shortage of doctors: It is ranked 41st of 50 states in the number of active physicians per 100,000 residents, according to the Assn. of American Medical Colleges.

Kenton Moss, MD, a family doctor who is part of an eight-physician group practice in Algona, Iowa -- a town of 5,200 near the Minnesota border -- is using the medical society program to recruit another family physician. The practice, which serves a local population area of 26,000, has been searching for another doctor for four years.

"We don't have the oceans and we don't have the mountains," said Dr. Moss, explaining why it can be tough to attract out-of-state physicians.

"The medical society kind of filled a big gap in promoting Iowa as a good environment to practice. We do things locally, but we were kind of missing that piece of the whole state and tooting our horn a little bit."

Recruiting options

For $150, state medical society members can access all the benefits of the recruiting service, which includes job listings on the organization's website and a list, by specialty, of all active physicians who have lived or trained in Iowa or have some other connection to the state. The service also offers tips on recruiting, such as how to conduct productive interviews.

"If you're working in a little practice in Lunchbox, Iowa, your recruiting program is probably pretty primitive," Abrams said. "We're confident this program will help with the primitive recruitment effort, but also help the already sophisticated recruitment program."

Iowa's Medicare pay rates are the second lowest in the country.

Travis Singleton, senior vice president of Irving, Texas-based physician recruiting firm Merritt Hawkins, said the Iowa effort sounds promising.

"I love, love, love the part of getting doctors to talk about their lives, getting doctors to give testimonials," he said. "No matter who the recruiter is, or what the method of recruitment is, you can never replace the collegial environment of the doctors. I can sell the place, but you can't replace hearing from a doctor who's living it."

Singleton said the Iowa effort, while laudable, should not be viewed as a replacement for a full-service recruiting firm. He noted that Merritt Hawkins has 15 recruiters working in Iowa. Recruiting firms' fees can range from $10,000 to $25,000, he said.

"This is just one more arrow in your quiver," Singleton said. "This could be an excellent resource that is well worth your money, but you shouldn't rely solely on this if the rubber meets the road and you need a physician in a defined amount of time."

The print version of this content appeared in the Aug. 9 issue of American Medical News.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Attracting physicians

The Iowa Medical Society's new physician recruiting initiative is aimed at addressing the difficulty its members have had in attracting doctors to work in a state that already ranks behind most others in physician supply.
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WEBLINK
"Iowa: A Practice Worth Living," Iowa Medical Society (www.practiceworthliving.org)

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