

For Immediate Release:

**SURVEY: PHYSICIAN RECRUITING COMES FULL CIRCLE,
PRIMARY CARE BACK ON TOP**

Internists, Family Physicians Lead List of Most-Recruited Doctors

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IRVING, TEXAS – In a case of “*déjà vu* all over again,” internists and family physicians are back on top of the list of most sought-after doctors, a new survey indicates. Conducted by national physician search firm Merritt, Hawkins & Associates, Irving, Texas, the survey tracks close to 3,000 physician search assignments represented by the firm from March 31, 2005 to April 1, 2006.

During that period, Merritt, Hawkins & Associates fielded more requests for internists and family practitioners from its hospital and medical group clients than for any other type of physician. Requests for family physicians were up 55% over the previous year and requests for internists were up 46%. After internists and family physicians, most requested specialties in the 2006 survey included radiologists, orthopedic surgeons, cardiologists and general surgeons.

Primary care physicians have not been at the top of the firm’s list of most requested doctors since the 1990s, when many health care organizations were seeking family physicians and internists to serve as managed care “gatekeepers.” Since then, requests steadily decreased before moving back up in 2005 then reaching the top this year. The dramatic post-1990s drop in demand for primary care physicians left some observers wondering if “generalist” doctors still have a role to play in today’s high tech medical environment.

“It’s true that specialist physicians have been driving the train in recent years,” notes Jim Merritt, president of Merritt, Hawkins & Associates, “but contrary to some projections, primary care physicians have not been left at the station.”

Merritt attributes the reemergence of primary care recruitment to several factors. The number of medical graduates specializing in family practice and general internal medicine has tailed off significantly this decade, inhibiting supply, while population growth and patient aging have increased demand. In recent years, hospitals and medical groups have focused on recruiting surgical and diagnostic specialists, and are now playing catch-up in primary care recruitment.

Difference makers

The survey also reflects increased use of recruiting incentives that can serve as “difference makers” in physician recruiting negotiations, Merritt observes. Signing bonuses were offered in 58% of the searches Merritt, Hawkins & Associates represented in the last 12 months, compared to 46% the previous year. The average amount of bonus offered increased from \$14,030 in the 2005 survey to \$20,480 in 2006. Educational loan forgiveness, offered in 14% of the searches the firm represented in 2005, was offered in 34% of searches this year.

“When it comes to crunch time and physicians are deciding between two opportunities, a signing bonus or loan repayment can tip the balance,” says Merritt.

CRNAs offered more than FPs

The 2006 survey tracks the financial incentives offered to certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNAs), the first time non-physicians have been included in the survey. On average, CRNAs were offered salaries of \$156,000, higher than the \$145,000 average offer made to family physicians. Of those specialties tracked, orthopedic surgeons received the highest average financial offer (\$370,000), followed by radiologists (\$351,000), and cardiologists (\$342,000).

A free copy of the survey is available on Merritt, Hawkins & Associates’ web site (www.merritthawkins.com) or by calling the firm at (800) 876-0500.