

ACAAI Women in Allergy Committee Resource Guide: Contract Negotiations

The information on contract negotiations below was provided by Leena Padhye, MD, FAAAAI

This topic can sound intimidating but is important in making sure your prospective new job is a good fit mutually. Usually if you are at the stage of contract negotiations, that means you are interested in this job opportunity and your prospective employer likes you. Particularly if you are a graduating fellow, it can feel like new territory to read a contract and advocate for yourself while also being thankful for a job opportunity.

Step 1: Get an expert to help you.

The legal jargon in contracts can sound both intimidating and somewhat like a foreign language. In order to actually understand what you are signing – and to advocate for yourself – we highly recommend spending the effort (and money) on expert legal counsel.

- ACAAI partners with a professional contract negotiating service called [Resolve](#), which specializes in contracts for medical professionals and offers a discount to College members.
- Consider hiring legal counsel that is well versed in physician contracts AND familiar with the state laws in your potential employment state.
- Lawyers will often have a fixed price for contract review.
- Many offer a discount for graduating fellows (make sure to ask if this applies to you).
- Legal counsel can help you better understand what are reasonable “asks” of an employer.

Step 2: Determine what is most important to you.

There are some key factors women physicians may need to consider when asking questions during negotiations or when trying to highlight important areas in their contracts. While we will all have many “wants,” the objective during contract negotiations is to figure out your non-negotiables. Always ask for a little more – it is rare to get everything and further this opens the door to negotiating for your absolute necessities.

Points to consider:

- Salary
 - Are you willing to take less salary for added flexibility?
 - Are you traveling all over – does this merit a pay increase?
 - Also make sure you research published salary data and advocate for a fair salary.
- Schedule flexibility
 - Consider hours worked, days off, and clinical locations.
 - For some, 8 am - 5 pm during clinic days may seem reasonable. For others, working shorter days (e.g., 7 am - 3:30 pm) may make more sense in order to juggle family responsibilities.
 - Think about commute times, etc. – Call rotations, hospital vs clinic call, etc.

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- Vacation
 - Is there flexibility to take time off if family needs dictate? Is this paid? Can you take unpaid time off in emergencies?
- Benefits
 - While many benefits are applicable regardless of gender, women physicians may want to consider specifically asking about:
 - Maternity leave policies.
 - Sick child or family member policies.
 - Pumping breaks in clinic.
 - Ability to become a partner (particularly in the case of maternity leave during the first several years of practice).

Step 3: Advocate for yourself while being respectful and reasonable.

- Be professional yet confident in what you are asking for. The worst answer you can get is “sorry, no.” You will never know if you don’t ask.
- Physicians may worry about asking in the first place. If you are respectful with your asks, this is not a reason someone will not hire you. Multiple studies show that women consistently ask for and receive less in contract negotiations – so it is important to have a voice and ask.
- If your prospective employer will not be able to help you with your non-negotiables, really consider if the two of you will be a good fit in the long term.
- Of course, it is important to be realistic when asking for additions or changes in the contract. Good legal counsel can help you with this.

Step 4: If it is not written in the contract, it is not in the contract.

- Make sure topics you have discussed with your prospective employer that are important to you are written into your contract.

Step 5: Read your contract (multiple times) and make sure you understand everything before signing.

- Jot down questions/concerns to ask your legal counsel as you read through.
- Make sure to ask your prospective employer any questions/concerns that come up.

Takeaways from the Women in Allergy’s “Breaking the Mold” call on Contract Negotiations

View the slide presentation that was discussed during the call: [Contract Negotiations](#)

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ACAAI Women in Allergy Committee Chair Dr. Selina Gierer introduced four experts in different to provide different career perspectives.

- Dr. Minh-Thu Le – private practice in a multi-specialty clinic
- Dr. Sarah Spriet – faculty and also public sector/government
- Dr. Jaspreet Benipal – early career allergist in private practice
- Jodi Shroba, CPNP – academic nurse practitioner who now works for a pharmaceutical company.

How did you find your position?

Dr. Minh-Thu Le – private practice in a multi-specialty clinic

- Sent letters to allergy offices in the geographic area she lived in and had some interviews.
- Things to consider:
 - Are you willing to travel to satellite clinics?
 - Attend a job fair or hire a recruiter – even if job fair isn't in allergy specialty.

Dr. Sarah Spriet – faculty and also public sector/government

- Networking plays a huge role. In the military, roles are assigned. When she was out of military service, she made connections via her roles in ACAAI committees.
- Things to consider:
 - Network at ACAAI Annual Meeting and go to ACAAI Job Fair.
 - Visit [USAJobs.gov](https://www.usajobs.gov) for federal job openings.
 - Your first may not be your last job, so take a chance and try something. OK to switch positions later.

Dr. Jaspreet Benipal – early career allergist private practice

- Because of her spouse's position, she was tied to a location. She saw a job as an NP, contacted the practice and asked if they were looking for physician, and they made it work.

Jodi Shroba, CPNP – academic nurse practitioner perspective who now works for a pharmaceutical company.

- Because she is a Nurse Practitioner Board certified in pediatrics, she could only work in pediatrics. Her position in industry as opposed to a medical practice has been a completely different experience. Her involvement and connections in ACAAI and AAAAI helped her get an industry job.

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Key considerations

Dr. Minh-Thu Le

- Types of practices (solo practitioner, multispecialty clinic owned by hospital or hospital-owned practice) – all have different aspects. Talk to ancillary staff during interview to get a feel for the practice atmosphere.
- If you are recently out of fellowship, you may not want to supervise yet. Check the contract – it may be spelled out there.
- It is important to ask why the practice is hiring – less turnover means staff is happy.

Dr. Sarah Spriet

- Military treatment facility/federal jobs generally have 1-4 allergists – no PAs or NPs.
- In her position, she has some practice decision making/supervising.
- She is salaried – and does not need to calculate RVUs. She has regular hours and efficient SOPs. PTO and sick time are included. She will get a pension after 20 years of service in addition to 401 K.
- Jobs in military facilities offer little room for negotiation when a position is offered.

Dr. Jaspreet Benipal

- Things to consider:
 - If a multispecialty practice, is an ENT present and are they practicing allergy?
 - If RVU-based, is this direct competition and who gets allergy referrals?
 - What kinds of support staff is available?
 - What is near the practice - is there an urgent care nearby?
 - Ask specific questions about your role – who will be doing oral food challenges? Who will be doing prior authorizations? Who makes phone calls?
 - It may take several emails back and forth to get your questions answered. Make sure to get questions answered in writing.

Jodi Shroba, CPNP

- In an academic setting, it is important to ask about noncompete clauses.
- Things to consider:
 - Is it an RVU based system? In academia, you may still have to be in clinic a certain number of hours to meet RVU requirements, which may leave research and teaching to be done on your own time. Does the RVU calculation include points research and teaching and publications? Points for supervising fellows? Compensation/bonus for publishing?

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- If your passion is research, make sure time is built in the contract to do it. Is seed money for research projects available or must you find own funding?

Other takeaways

- Spend time in practice as part of the interview process.
- If you have a VISA, make sure to bring this up early in the interview process.
- If your practice uses collections, they are: you bill, insurance pays according what was negotiated, minus expenses = collections.
- Practices must use benchmarks – usually MGMA or AAMC. If they don't use one of these, it is a red flag.
- Moving bonus and sign on bonuses are taxable income.
- Ask for what you want and be persistent, even if they say, "No one else has asked for that" or "No one else gets that."
- Is tail coverage provided if you leave a practice?
- Advocate for yourself respectfully – in any position, they are interviewing you, but you are also interviewing them.
- The *New England Journal of Medicine* has [strategies to avoid pitfalls in physician employment contracts](#)

The contract:

- Benefits are important. They are where contract negotiations go beyond salary. Have benefits spelled out in contract.
- Make sure the offer letter and contract have all necessary info included.
- Don't let any language in the contract be vague. It's worth investing in a lawyer to eliminate any vague language. Get a lawyer who understands contracts in medical careers.
- ACAAI partners with [Resolve](#), a professional contract negotiating service that specializes in contracts for medical professionals. College members get a discount on Resolve's services.

ACAAI has contract negotiation resources:

- Watch [Dr. Stanley Fineman's talk "Fundamental Principles of Contract Negotiation"](#) from the FIT section of the College's 2021 Annual Scientific Meeting. (22 minutes)
- Read the [AMA article: Understanding employment contracts](#).
- This [ReachMD podcast](#) provides best practices for contract negotiation from a contract attorney.

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- Consider using [Resolve, a national firm specializing in physician employment contract review](#). Resolve provides professional guidance on navigating and negotiating salary and benefits – and College members receive discounts on their services.
- Watch the Resolve webinar [Allergist Salary Data and Employment Contract Review Tips](#) to get guidance on navigating and negotiating salary and benefits, negotiating your call schedule, non-compete clauses and more.
- The College's [RVU toolkit](#) and webinar [Making RVUs Work for You](#) (March 16, 2022) explain what work relative value units (wRVUs) are, the role they play in compensation models, and specific wRVU issues for allergists and how to address them. (62 minutes)
- Get [2023 MGMA allergy compensation data](#), including median starting salary for new allergists.