



# How to Hire Your Next Urgent Care Manager

**Urgent message:** Urgent care centers need engaged and effective operations leadership, which entails clearly defining managerial roles, individual skillsets, and personality characteristics and also having a process for attracting, interviewing, and qualifying managerial candidates.

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Jim Clifton, the highly respected CEO of global performance and research leader Gallup, has often stated that hiring the right manager is by far the most critical decision a company makes. Given how multifaceted and demanding urgent care operations can be at times, this maxim rings especially true in our industry. Putting a competent, skilled urgent care professional in a leadership position can reap huge dividends, while handing the reins to a poor fit can throw the operation into chaos in short order. The question is, how can you ensure the next person you hire as a manager/operator/director is the best choice?

There are many strategies you could employ, but industry experts are in near consensus that by diligently adhering to the hiring best practices described here, you dramatically increase your odds of winding up with a great fit to lead your urgent care to peak performance and sustained profitability.

## Define the Role

While the mission of every urgent care center is to provide fast, low-cost ambulatory care for minor illness and injury, the size and scale of the different operations can vary greatly. And for each type of entity, there's a best fit candidate it should hone in on. Hence, the first step in your managerial search is to define the role.

Smaller and midsize urgent care operations, for example, would be looking for a candidate who can go above and beyond the typical scope, and take on such tasks as revenue cycle management, human resources issues, and perhaps minor clinical responsibilities. Given the



necessarily leaner staffing model, a flexible, versatile, jack-of-all-trades manager capable of wearing multiple hats is the obvious choice here.

Larger-scale urgent care entities, and operations that may or may not be aligned with hospital systems, on the other hand, would have a more delineated hierarchy. This type of urgent care system would likely have a medical director/operations manager overseeing the operations of multiple clinics, with specialized staff below them on the organizational chart handling spe-

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cific departmental functions. In most cases, though, the overall responsibilities of the typical urgent care “operator” are very similar: manage all aspects of the day-to-day clinic operation.

In either scenario, it’s crucial to clearly define the role well ahead of your candidate search. Questions to consider:

- What’s the size and scale of my urgent care operation, as it relates to the full skillset my manager will need?
- How much clinical experience, if any, will my next manager need?
- How many hats will my manager be required to wear on a daily basis?
- What’s the proper mix of education and experience necessary to thrive in the role?
- Once you have the answers to these basic questions, you’re ready to move on to the next step in the hiring process.

### Education and Experience

Although the amount and type of education and hands-on experience necessary can vary depending on the operation, both factors should line up with the primary responsibilities of the manager/operator role, which would include the following:

- Ensuring that the clinic(s) is opened and closed in accordance with operating hours, and is appropriately staffed
- Hiring, training, and supervision of clinical, administrative, and clerical staff
- Ensuring that business functions and clinical activities are in compliance with all company policies and procedures
- Maintaining properly functioning equipment while overseeing its maintenance and repair
- Ordering inventory and monitoring usage of supplies
- Interacting with patients, and addressing and resolving customer service concerns
- Balancing the cash drawer and making daily bank deposits
- Coordinating and facilitating vendor activities and services
- Overseeing the billing function and resolving refunds, billing holds, and accounting corrections
- Acting as a backup for the registration and clinical staff when there is a staffing shortage or high patient demand

This list of responsibilities is not exhaustive. However, the managerial candidate should have a minimum level of education and experience in the following areas:

- High school diploma (or equivalent) and at least 5 years’ experience in a management role
- Proven understanding of medical terminology, medical billing functions and systems, and medical coding
- Current and comprehensive training in HIPPA, OSHA, and all aspects of blood-borne pathogens
- Proficiency with common PC programs and applications such as internet, email, and Microsoft Office productivity tools
- Familiarity with and the ability to utilize a profit-and-loss report toward developing actions plans that maximize center profitability
- In-depth understanding of the principles and processes of high-level customer service, including customer issue resolution and assuring a consistently superior level of service
- Proven proficiency in supervising, coaching, and mentoring staff via interpersonal and communication skills

As mentioned, there is no one-size-fits-all educational and experience skillset for managerial candidates, as each organization and role will emphasize different requirements. Some hospital-affiliated urgent care operations require their center manager to have a nursing background, for instance, so naturally that candidate would need the commensurate licensing, certifications, and clinical education and experience that an administrator or office manager wouldn’t.

Conversely, in the case of a medical director or even a C-level urgent care executive, the skillset emphasis would be on higher-level strategic initiatives, the ability to oversee multiple centers and/or department functions, and delegating responsibilities down the chain of command.

### Personality Characteristics

From the daily interactions with staff and patients, to the ebb and flow of general clinic demand, urgent care is a dynamic, fast-paced business model. As such, the center manager should be a leader who is intelligent, adaptable, organized, and an excellent communicator. His or her personality should be friendly and even-tempered, as they constantly deal with patients, physicians, vendors, clerical, clinical, and administrative staffers, and other company stakeholders. And while an easygo-

ing and affable demeanor is a plus, the manager must also possess a forceful yet magnetic personality, and seamlessly blend it with strong leadership capabilities. In a high-stress environment such as urgent care, after all, it won't be long before the manager must either deal with an internal crisis, mediate a dispute between staffers, or soothe an irate patient. Additionally, as the de facto "captain of the ship," the manager must have a knack for motivating staff, along with the judgement to determine when they should jump in and handle a situation or delegate to another capable staffer.

Overall, the manager should bring an infectious and positive attitude to work that inspires the team and provides a great example. By balancing an empathetic and caring attitude with a driven, focused approach to center performance and profitability, an urgent care manager is well equipped to successfully handle the many challenges the position entails.

### How to Find the Best Candidates

Now that you have a clear understanding of the type of person you want managing your center, how do you go about finding them? As Jim Clifton emphasized, installing a manager or leader is not a decision your organization can afford to get wrong, so you'll want to tap as many quality sources as you can in rounding up a pool of viable candidates.

First, there's the old standby, word-of-mouth. Let your colleagues know you're looking for a manager, and ask around your professional circles to see if there's a potential great fit out there you could bring in for an interview. Additional sourcing strategies can include the following:

- Professional networking sites – Websites like LinkedIn are excellent places to find talented job seekers, including medical professionals. Typing in a few targeted search terms should quickly bring up a number of groups, companies, jobs, and medical professional profiles you can begin to research for viable candidates.
- Medical job boards – Online job boards specific to

*“Overly negative recollections about past coworkers and patients can actually be more reflective of the candidate’s own professional shortcomings.”*

our industry are an ideal way to advertise your managerial opening, as you're almost certain to reach your target audience there. Additionally, experienced candidates who understand the value of professional medical organizations are already members, so they're self-vetting in that sense.

■ Website job posting – Posting your job opening directly on the company website is another good way to attract candidates. Especially for larger urgent care organizations, career-minded individuals should have little problem find-

ing your managerial posting after a relevant Google search.

### Interviewing Tips

After whittling down the initial pool of candidates to a few qualified finalists, it's time to conduct interviews. As everyone you bring in has presumably met the minimum qualifications, the interview moves the hiring process along further, putting you face-to-face with the remaining managerial candidates. This is your opportunity to ask questions and further "feel out" candidates towards determining if they're the right fit for your manager position.

Questions should be devised to help you glean insights into your candidate's past experience, strengths and weaknesses, and prevailing attitudes toward work, patient care, and their coworkers. For example, always ask what they like about their current or past job. The answers you're looking for are the ones that correlate to your management position (eg, thriving in a fast-paced environment, the ability to perform in a fluid, dynamic workplace, and forming strong relationships with coworkers).

By contrast, be sure to ask what they least liked about their past job. Listen closely here, as these answers tend to be even more insightful. Industry experts agree that substandard pay and long hours are acceptable responses, but overly negative recollections about past coworkers and patients can actually wind up being more reflective of the candidate's own professional shortcomings.

Another important question to ask is how many hours the managerial candidate is willing to work. The

correct answer, of course, is as many as necessary. Again, the manager is the captain of the ship, so they should be willing to be at the center as much as necessary to ensure that things are running smoothly. A managerial candidate who is not open to working extra hours and a variety of shifts, including weekends, simply doesn't understand the requirements of the position and may not be a good fit.

Lastly, don't forget the challenging, open-ended questions: The toughest decision they had to make in their last job, the most challenging incident, how they resolved a major conflict, etc. Not only are you looking for answers that offer insight into their management style and how they deal with adversity, but you're also listening for the behavioral characteristics you value—calm, intelligent, resourceful, even-keeled, thoughtful, team player, and mature professional.

### Red Flags

The same way you're evaluating managerial candidates for the positive traits necessary to thrive as your center's leader, you should also be on the lookout for warning signs and red flags. The last thing you want is a poor-fit candidate making it all the way through to the offer stage, only for you to discover that they're a flawed choice. A few common red flags:

- Asking about salary too soon – A candidate should not be inquiring about salary over the phone or via email until they have at least been onsite at the center, met and mingled with the staff they would be managing, and fully understand the requirements of the position and role. Managing a center is a real commitment, to be fulfilled by candidates who truly love the medical and patient care industry. Hence, money should never be the overriding consideration.
- Excessive "I" responses – Urgent care is a team environment, such that a candidate who answers every question with, "I did this" or "I accomplished such and such" may be indicating that they have trouble delegating, is too focused on themselves, or is not a team player. If a promising candidate answers this way often, you may need to probe further with additional questions.
- Lack of people skills – If, during the interview questions, the candidate's answers consistently indicate that he or she lacks awareness of the people skills required to thrive in the role—for instance, focusing too much on the technical aspects of their past experience and the current opening—it could be a red

flag. First and last, urgent care is a people business, so a candidate who doesn't share positive, uplifting, and interesting experiences with past patients and coworkers may not grasp the interpersonal skills it takes to successfully lead an urgent care.

### Conclusion

Whether the job title is medical director, operations manager, center manager, medical administrator, or office manager, the overarching objective is essentially the same: installing a leader and "operator" for your urgent care. To that end, you want to hire a skilled and energetic healthcare professional who understands the ins and outs of the business, can effectively manage people and situations, and has an unflinching commitment to maximizing center performance and profitability. By adhering to these hiring best practices, your organization can go forward with the confidence that it will likely wind up with a great fit, and an ideal pairing that allows the manager and the organization both to flourish. ■

### Summary

- The first step in finding the most ideal managerial candidate is to define the role as it applies to *your* urgent care center; what tasks will that person be expected to take on, for example?
- Common traits that are necessary for any candidate include being adaptable, organized, and an excellent communicator.
- Casting a wide net will yield a suitable number of prospects. Try such varied approaches as old-fashioned word-of-mouth, scouring medical job boards and networking sites (eg, LinkedIn), and posting the job on your own website.
- Interviews should help you correlate the candidates' experience with your needs. Asking what they like or don't like about their current position will offer insights into whether they'd be a good fit.
- Observing how candidates handle open-ended questions can give you a glimpse of their behavioral characteristics: Are they calm, resourceful, thoughtful, intelligent, mature...?
- Common "red flags" that a candidate may not be a good fit include asking about salary too soon, using a lot of "I" statements, and dwelling on the technical aspects of the job at the expense of talking about how they deal with other people.