Developing a Fair Hiring Framework and Inclusive Interviewing Practices

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1. Background
A diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace is a priority for our National Cancer Institute-Designated Comprehensive Cancer Center. Our team recognized the opportunity to help achieve this goal by improving departmental hiring practices, utilizing the best available evidence to minimize conscious and unconscious bias in the hiring process. Available literature suggests that unstructured interviews can be unreliable job performance indicators and increase the risk of evaluating characteristics beyond a candidate's experience and abilities.

2. Goal
Our goal is to create a framework that produces a more inclusive, transparent, and defendable interviewing process. Together we aim to eliminate avenues for bias and prejudice, while emphasizing candidate qualifications based on position description requirements as opposed to undefined concepts such as 'fit.'

3. Solutions and Methods
The Clinical Research Management group at the Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) Knight Cancer Institute formed a committee of volunteers, which met bi-weekly and comprised representatives from multiple research programs and positions, tasked with redesigning the hiring process. Many aspects of identity were considered in assessing necessary changes to the interview and hiring process including, but not limited to, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, and age. Position descriptions were deemed foundational, and each was mined for required qualifications, key responsibilities, and core competencies. Standard role-based question sets were created based solely on the committee's thorough review of each position description and the available evidence regarding fair interview question structure. An interview question response grading tool was created, utilizing the Qualtrics platform, to numerically score responses in real time and eliminate post-interview group discussion and reflection on unevaluable concepts such as 'gut feel' or 'fit'. Review of and improvements to all aspects were undertaken in conjunction with OHSU's Center for Diversity and Inclusion. Guidelines were created to help standardize communication with candidates, interview structure, numeric scoring of responses, and the resulting translation of overall score into the hiring decision process. Finally, we consolidated our work into a best practices document and piloted our new framework within two research groups, presenting the resulting feedback to department leadership.

4. Outcome
This process has now been implemented in several research programs within the department. Qualitative feedback was solicited in several planned sessions, including both the interviewers and interviewees. The feedback received has consistently been positive, with respondents appreciating both the efficient method and the expeditious process for providing and receiving feedback. We have also identified emerging challenges, such as resistance to change and difficulties adapting to the new process that we are actively working to address.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

This will be a continuous process improvement, with changes over time as we continue to receive feedback based upon expanded implementation and evaluate metrics of success. It is our goal that a hiring process that is more disciplined, standardized, and evidenced-based will ultimately be more equitable and allow us to draw a more diverse and highly skilled workforce.