

Reference/Testimonial for A-Team

Profile of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital

Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital (OLOLH), Drogheda is the main acute hospital in the North East region of the Republic of Ireland. The Dept. of Anaesthesia provides anaesthesia and intensive care medicine services for the following specialties: general surgery, including major upper and lower gastrointestinal surgery and paediatric general surgery, ear, nose and throat surgery, urology, dental surgery, orthopaedic surgery, including trauma surgery (regional unit) and paediatric orthopaedic surgery, obstetrics (4,000-4,500 deliveries per year), gynaecology and intensive care medicine (eight-bedded Intensive Care Unit/High Dependency Unit (ICU/HDU)). The Dept. of Anaesthesia provides elective anaesthesia services for children greater than one year old. Because of the reconfiguration of hospital services in the region, the number of beds in OLOLH is planned to increase from 335 to 394 and the number of ICU/HDU beds is planned to increase from eight to fifteen.

Anaesthetic staffing in July 2010

In July 2010, there was a severe shortage of anaesthetic junior doctors in OLOLH. Only seven out of fourteen posts were filled. Therefore, there were only seven doctors to cover daytime duties and two on call rotas. A large number of locum agency doctors were used to cover the on call rota. For example, locum agency doctors covered one tier of the on call rota every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. This meant that, every Friday, Saturday and Sunday, one of the two anaesthetic junior doctors on call did not work in OLOLH during normal working hours and was unfamiliar with the hospital and clinical service. A large number of locum agencies sent me CVs of doctors in other countries who were apparently seeking anaesthetic junior doctor posts in Ireland. Many of these CVs were from obviously unsuitable applicants. We conducted many telephone interviews with applicants whom we thought were potentially suitable, and offered posts to many of these applicants, but all but one of these doctors refused the offers. The only doctor who accepted the offer of a post and came to work in OLOLH had extremely poor English and, because of this, could only work under direct supervision and was unable to work on call. I concluded that conducting telephone interviews with doctors in other countries is highly unsatisfactory, from the point of view of both the interviewers and the interviewees.

A-Team

In late July 2010, I met Harry Harron, Regional Director of A-Team Recruitment in Hungary and Romania. He explained to me the A-Team approach to medical recruitment:

- Advertising within an Eastern European region with a population of 80 million people.
- Screening of candidates for levels of English and clinical experience.
- Organising language testing of candidates.
- Organising recruitment events where candidates are interviewed face-to-face in one of A-Team's offices in Eastern Europe.
 - These events may, if required, include clinical testing using manikins.
- Facilitating all communication between the employer and candidates.

- A-Team provides a single point of contact for employer and candidate.
- All communication is in the candidate's own language which prevents any misunderstandings.
- Assistance with registration with the Irish Medical Council.
- Organising flights and "meet and greet" services for candidates when they arrive in Ireland.

Predicted anaesthetic staffing in January, 2011

The changeover date for anaesthetic junior doctors in January 2011 was Monday, 10 January 2011. In November 2010, there were only three anaesthetic junior doctors confirmed to take up duty on that date, i.e. only three out of fourteen posts would be filled. This level of staffing, if not improved, would cause the collapse of acute services in OLOLH, Drogheda.

Preparation for recruitment events in Budapest, Hungary

With the advice of Harry Harron and his colleague, Margaret Kiss, we wrote a detailed job description for our anaesthetic junior doctor posts and designed a customised application form so that we could assess the anaesthetic experience of applicants. We decided that applicants should have a minimum of one year's, but preferably 2-3 years, experience in Anaesthesia. We considered it desirable, but not essential, that this experience included anaesthesia for trauma surgery, obstetric anaesthesia, paediatric anaesthesia and Intensive Care Medicine. We also prepared a PowerPoint presentation about Ireland, Drogheda and OLOLH. This presentation would be given on the day of the recruitment event and would be followed by a question and answer session. A-Team sent us the CVs of applicants and we decided which applicants we wished to interview.

Success of recruitment events in Budapest, Hungary

We have now been involved in two recruitment events in A-Team's offices in Budapest, Hungary. The first was on Wednesday, 01 December 2010, and the second was on Wednesday, 13 April 2011. These events have been extremely successful. They led to the appointment of seven anaesthetic junior doctors for January 2011 (increasing the number of doctors from three to ten), six for July 2011 and two for January 2012. All doctors had at least two years' experience in Anaesthesia. After the recruitment event, A-Team ensured that the appointed doctors were registered with the Irish Medical Council before their start dates and, when this was confirmed, they arranged their flights to Ireland.

Format of recruitment events in Budapest, Hungary

On both occasions, the interviewers comprised two consultant anaesthetists from OLOLH, Drogheda, and the Medical Manpower Manager for the Louth-Meath hospital group. We flew to Hungary the day before the event and returned to Ireland the day after the event. During the afternoon before the event, we rehearsed the PowerPoint presentation about Ireland, Drogheda and OLOLH. On the day of each event, we interviewed ten candidates. Interview questions included those about anaesthetic techniques and clinical problems, which allowed us to individually assess an applicant's knowledge and experience. After the lunch break, I gave the prepared PowerPoint

presentation and I and my colleagues answered questions. All candidates received a handout of the presentation. The job description and the PowerPoint presentation gave detailed information about the post, including the type of post (service vs. training) and the expected salary (basic salary and allowances). We told candidates that, if offered a post, we would expect them to sign a contract for one year. We also outlined for candidates the possible career pathways after working for one year in OLOLH, e.g. work in OLOLH for a second year, work in a Dublin teaching hospital for a year, apply for Irish anaesthetic training. On the day after the recruitment event, all doctors who were offered posts signed one-year contracts.

Assessment of the recruitment process

I cannot over-emphasise the importance of meeting candidates face-to-face. Not only does this make it easier for the employer to assess the candidate, but it also makes it easier for the candidate to evaluate the employer, the post and the hospital. At present (August 2011), there are thirteen Hungarian and Romanian doctors working in OLOLH, Drogheda. After initial orientation and induction, all have been able to participate fully in daytime and on-call duties. They are very well liked by other hospital staff and are generally perceived as being very pleasant and polite, as well as being energetic, enthusiastic and hard-working. The recruitment of these doctors has allowed the Dept. of Anaesthesia to increase the number of anaesthetic junior doctors on call from two to three, as recommended in an external review of anaesthetic staffing. This has greatly improved the safety of the anaesthetic service.

Future recruitment

The Dept. of Anaesthesia in OLOLH, Drogheda, has been extremely impressed with the recruitment process used by A-Team. I wish to emphasise that our opinion refers not only to the **quantity**, but also to the **quality** of junior doctors appointed. Provided we can start the recruitment process 5-6 months in advance, we are now confident that we can fill all our anaesthetic junior doctor posts and avoid uncertainty about staffing and desperate recruitment efforts shortly before the junior doctor changeover date. The key elements of the recruitment process have been high-quality screening and selection of candidates for interview, providing detailed information for candidates about the post, the hospital and Ireland, face-to-face interviews in Eastern Europe, ensuring prompt registration with the Irish Medical Council and providing a warm welcome and personal and professional support for the doctors after their arrival in Ireland. It is also worth bearing in mind that registration with the Irish Medical Council is a much more straightforward process for doctors from the European Union, e.g. Hungary and Romania, than for those from outside the European Union, e.g. India and Pakistan. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish further information about our experience with A-Team.

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