

Recruiting and Staffing of Physicians, Physician Assistants And Nurse Practitioners for Government Contracts



Bob Eskridge - President

CEOCFO: *Mr. Eskridge, would you tell us about Eskridge and Associates?*

Mr. Eskridge: We are a service disabled, veteran-owned small business specializing in recruiting and staffing of physicians, physician assistants and nurse practitioners on government contracts nationwide.

CEOCFO: *Do the physician and physician assistants' population in general like to work with the government?*

Mr. Eskridge: Yes, for a variety of reasons. A number of my physicians that have been in civilian practice for a while like to do contract work with the government to get exposed to different patient populations which may present different issues. For example, if they are going to the Veterans Administration, they are going to be dealing with veterans from our services and dealing with specific issues that may be related to Afghanistan and Iraq for example, that they may not have experience with on the civilian side. It is definitely intriguing for physicians to get involved with those veterans from time to time. It is the same way working with the military armed services. They are dealing with a population on a regular basis that they may not be exposed to in their civilian practice.

CEOCFO: *There have been issues with the VA and the government in general. Has that deterred physicians?*

Mr. Eskridge: I think it is probably more on a case-by-case basis. It is no different from the civilian side; many issues that civilian hospitals are experiencing, our veterans' hospitals are dealing with. I believe the media tends to sensationalize issues with VA hospitals. There are issues with individual hospitals in the veterans system that there may be some apprehension to go to but that is no different from on the civilian side. There are good and poor hospitals across the spectrum. It can effect the recruiting of physicians based on which hospital we are recruiting for.

CEOCFO: *In many areas of staffing, corporate culture is important or are skills what it comes down to at the end of the day?*

Mr. Eskridge: Certainly, skills have to be there. People have to be qualified to do the job but I think that is only the beginning. Many times personalities come into play that can make or break an assignment. Many times when I am recruiting personnel to various locations, I try to keep them where they are used to practicing or in that same general area. For example, if I place somebody that has been in Florida their entire career in the northeast and they are not used to the winter weather of 30 inches of snow, if they are not used to that, their chances of being happy are pretty remote. I try to take into account their personalities and their experience to make sure it is a good fit for the assignment.

CEOCFO: *On your site, it indicates, "Our Standard is Exceptional." Would you elaborate?*

Mr. Eskridge: That is borrowing from the VA. We get rated on every placement that we do which is called a Contractor Performance Assessment Report. That is basically our report card and "Exceptional" the top mark. We strive for exceptional reports on every assignment.

CEOCFO: *Are you strictly working with government or are you working with commercial clients as well?*

Mr. Eskridge: When I first started the company back in 2002, we exclusively did civilian practice but over the last five to six years because of my veteran status, it gave us an opportunity to do government work and we have been very successful with it. We probably do about 99% of our business with government agencies. Not that I do not do civilian work, I still have some clients that I work with but I would say the vast majority of our practice is on the government side.

CEOCFO: *Are you bidding on contracts like many other government related organizations?*

Mr. Eskridge: It is all contracts. We have a robust business development segment of business where we are constantly reviewing solicitations. They initially send out a "Sources Sought" announcement where they are looking for companies

like mine to bid on particular projects to see if we have the capabilities and the background to be able to support it. Yes, we are bidding and looking at Requests for Proposals all the time.

CEOCFO: *Would it be to staff a new facility or one doctor at a time?*

Mr. Eskridge: It is a spectrum. We do assignments anywhere from three months to a long-term contract of a year plus four one-year options. It ends up being basically a permanent placement. It could be for people that are going overseas and we are back filling the position on the States side, so it is relative short-term. It could be because of transfers to other locations on the military side where we will back someone with a physician so they can hire somebody permanently, to long-term at the VA where it might end up being a five-year contract.

CEOCFO: *How do you reach out to the healthcare community?*

Mr. Eskridge: We have extensive contacts throughout the community. There are specific government websites that we advertise on about our services to contracting officers. We also go to various trade conferences where they specifically are looking for small businesses to work with. There is a national conference that we have gone to where we will meet with twenty or thirty contracting officers over two or three days. We explain our services and what we have been able to support on past contracts and learn about their needs coming up for the new year and see if we might be a particular match. We also get word of mouth from various contracting officers where they have immediate needs to fill and they will call us directly. Especially on the VA side and because we are service disabled. Certified service disabled companies are allowed to be awarded contracts directly without going through the competitive process.

“We strive to be the leader in healthcare recruiting and staffing. To be recognized for exceptional performance by our clients and providers and to be an employer of choice by our employees and staff.” - Bob Eskridge

CEOCFO: *How are you reaching the doctors and physicians assistants?*

Mr. Eskridge: We advertise on a number of niche job boards; they are kind of the physician version of Monster or Career Builders where they are specifically targeting physicians. We also have a database of about 300,000 doctors that we advertise, email and text. They are very good about referring opportunities to their colleagues and have them contact me.

CEOCFO: *Do you find that medical communities that you work with tend to move around more than people did years ago?*

Mr. Eskridge: Certainly, on the physician side that is the case. They are a lot more mobile now. We also place Nurses, Allied Health, medical technicians and medical administrative folks. They tend to stay in their local areas so they generally do not move that much. The physician assistants and nurse practitioners are kind of in the middle ground and tend to be more mobile than the nurses and Allied Health but not as mobile as the physicians. Physicians will live in Florida but they will go all over the country for assignments and they like it because they are only required to have one state license on a federal position. They can be based in Florida and have an opportunity in Alaska for a six-month assignment. They will take off and enjoy the location as much as the position itself.

CEOCFO: *Is there increased interest in physician assistants and nurse practitioners?*

Mr. Eskridge: There is a huge interest especially with the onset of the Affordable Care Act. With the addition of the hundreds of thousands of new insured folks, access to medical help is just getting worse. Using physician assistants and nurse practitioners is an excellent way to augment the medical staff to get the patients seen.

CEOCFO: *Do patients care whether it is a nurse practitioner or physician, or is it not a consideration for them?*

Mr. Eskridge: I think it depends on what their issue is. I think in a primary care environment, it is less of an issue. If they have a more acute issue, they definitely want to know they are talking to a doctor. With the increase of physician assistants and nurse practitioners and what they are able to do, they are bringing a lot of energy to the community and being able to service the needs of patients. They are definitely stepping up their capabilities. The government is giving them more latitude in what they can do in providing care for the patients. It is definitely a hot field for the next several years I am sure. It is much cheaper and much faster to train a physician assistant or nurse practitioner than it is to train a doctor.

CEOCFO: *I realize location is not as important as it once was. Is there a disadvantage to being in Texas and working with government agencies?*

Mr. Eskridge: *It is never a disadvantage to be in Texas!* I do have people that work for me in other locations. One is based in the Dayton, Ohio area, close to the Air Force Medical Command at Wright-Patterson AFB. He is able to meet with those folks on a regular basis. I have another individual based in the Virginia area and she is able to service the Navy

and Defense Health Agency on a regular basis. It is certainly advantageous. With us here in the here in the Austin area, the Army Medical Command is based in San Antonio at Fort Sam Houston. We have ready access to them. It makes sense to have offices where the major commands are to be able to be in touch with decision makers on a regular basis.

CEOCFO: *Do you need to be concerned with background checks of the people that you are presenting?*

Mr. Eskridge: We absolutely need to be concerned.

CEOCFO: *How do you make sure people are who they say they are?*

Mr. Eskridge: The whole process is called credentialing and security. It is important for any place but certainly, with the government with the issues we are having on a national basis with the terrorist watch. When we place a physician who has been conditionally approved based on their skill set, they go through two processes. One is a security review and the second is their credentialing. We will do an initial background check which is a high level review but then the government will do a full security background check on them and it is an intensive process they go through to make sure they are who they say they are and that they are a good guy or good gal. The second track is the credentialing. What we are doing is specifically doing a primary source verification on all the information basically on their resume or curriculum vitae that they provide. If they say they graduated from a particular university and residency, we are calling that university or that residency program to verify that this person did graduate through that program. For the last ten years, with every position that they held for employment, we call that facility to verify that information to make sure it was true. It is no different from anybody hiring an individual, when they get their resume they want to make sure what is on there is true and hopefully they will do a background check and verify the information. We actually have to document everything that has been done. Every time they go to a new position that process is done again. It is labor intensive but very necessary.

CEOCFO: *What is the competitive landscape for Eskridge & Associates?*

Mr. Eskridge: It is a much smaller competitive landscape from what you would expect. It is divided up into three different segments. There are the large businesses, the major corporations that do this. There are several folks that are small single-owner shops where they do a great deal of permanent placement on a contingency basis which is how I got started in this business. I worked out of my home for the first eight years and the first five was permanent placement, doing basically a transactional business. As you grow, you can expand into more services, especially when you get into what is called locum tenens, which is Latin for "stand in place of," the temporary staffing world for physicians. You have to have a malpractice policy, which is a major financial commitment and you have to build up the staff and relationships to be able to support that line of business

CEOCFO: *What do you understand about putting people and employment together?*

Mr. Eskridge: I think it is no different from any other business; people like doing business with people they like. You have to be able to have a conversation on the phone and be engaging. The biggest secret to this business and what I found to be very successful to Eskridge & Associates is communication. We try to under promise and over deliver. We try to be very intensive in our communications with both our patients and clients in managing expectations. When those expectations cannot be met, we get on the phone with them and explain what is happening. Many times I have received compliments from both candidates and clients that the level of communications that we have with them is admirable.

CEOCFO: *What did you learn as an Eagle Scout that hold true today?*

Mr. Eskridge: I have been in Boy Scouts since I was eight years old. I have been heavily involved with them as an adult after I went through the program. I think one of the biggest things I got through becoming an Eagle Scout is learning how to manage projects and work with people. Even now, as is a Second Class or First Class scout, you have your first patrol. You basically have a mini business there. Whether it is going on a weekend campout or doing a service project, you are setting a mission for your team and you are trying to allocate your resources of your patrol members to achieve that mission. Whether you realize it or not going through the program, you are learning life-long management and communication skills. Often times, when I start on a major project the first thing I find myself am thinking is I need eight people because that was the standard size patrol, and here are the responsibilities for those eight people. Often I am thinking in terms of, here is the mission, what my resources will be, how I will allocate my resources, how I achieve a goal in the least amount of time and resources. I look back to my time in Boy Scouts and smile because of the many opportunities I did not realize at the time have come into play in my professional career.

CEOCFO: *Eskridge & Associates was recognized as a top staffing firm and one of the Austin Fast 50. How do you continue the trajectory and what is next?*

Mr. Eskridge: We manage the growth. Many times, you hear of companies that grow at such a rate that they cannot support it. A major concern for me is making sure that if I have a projection of a certain level of revenues for the coming

year, what resources I need to support that growth. That is what keeps me up at night; making sure that I have the internal staff that can do the job and support that level of communication and level of support my clients deserve and expect.

CEOCFO: *Why is Eskridge & Associates a noteworthy company?*

Mr. Eskridge: It is our vision statement. We strive to be the leader in healthcare recruiting and staffing. To be recognized for exceptional performance by our clients and providers and to be an employer of choice by our employees and staff.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine



**For more information visit:
www.eskridgeassociates.com**

**Contact:
Robert L Eskridge
512.244.7023
bob@eskridgeassociates.com**