



Case Study:

# Valley Children's Specialty Medical Group

Valley Children's Hospital



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## Challenge

Valley Children's Specialty Medical Group, Inc. (SMG) is a hospital-based medical corporation associated with Valley Children's Healthcare, a network focused on providing high-quality pediatric care to every child and family in a vast, 45,000 square-mile service area. This healthcare system incorporates a main 358-bed freestanding children's hospital in Madera, the medical foundation, and network of physicians, clinics and satellite facilities throughout the region – the neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) owned and operated in Fresno, Hanford and Merced, specialty care centers in Modesto, Merced, Madera, Bakersfield and Visalia, partnership locations, and primary care physicians and clinics.

Although caring for the health of children is SMG's specialty, its own health was in trouble in 2009. The group's executive team was struggling with a serious ongoing issue: recruiting and retaining pediatric subspecialists for openings at the main hospital (then named Children's Hospital Central California) and its outreach clinics. Specifically, SMG needed to fill eight critical pediatric subspecialty positions and a new leadership opening. Especially challenging was the need to staff the North Market specialty clinic, located ninety minutes north of the main campus with pediatric neurology, pediatric gastroenterology and pediatric cardiology. The ideal candidates for these positions would need to have an entrepreneurial mindset and the desire to start and grow the practice there, a huge recruiting challenge as the target pool of doctors would already be in private practice and not likely to want to uproot and start over. Moreover, the group desperately needed two pediatric surgeons and a pediatric urologist – the latter search having been open for more than four years. Finally, the state-of-the-art, then 340-bed children's hospital was also in need of a Medical Director of Maternal Fetal Medicine (MFM) to head up a critical new program in partnership with a local hospital.

In a five-year period, the SMG team had worked with internal recruiters, as well as six traditional retained and contingency firms. Despite this long-term and extensive effort, the critical positions remained unfilled or the subspecialists who were recruited did not remain in their jobs. Inevitably, the new recruits weren't a good "fit" for the opportunities, something which had not been revealed in the recruitment process.

"The firms would source candidates and do reference checks, but things would break down at the negotiation table," says Paul Lilles, Director of Regional Operations and Physician Practice Services at SMG. "The recruiters didn't have the relationship with the physicians to pull out what was really needed to close the deal," he adds.

The result: extreme frustration, lost time and money, and a general sense of hopelessness among hospital staff and its recruitment firms. Some of the recruiters became overwhelmed by the difficulty of filling the jobs and deemed the positions "unfillable" then stopped working on the searches. The financial impact of the terminated searches was devastating; the group spent \$250,000 on one firm alone, without a return on their investment. SMG knew they needed to change something, and fast. But what could they do, when it seemed they had already tried every available option?



## Solution

Their answer came one day in 2009, when Jane Willson, VP of Corporate Development, received an email from Glenda Smith, who had served as her Director of Physician Recruitment at Egleston Children's Hospital at Emory University in Atlanta for three years. During Smith's tenure at Egleston, she successfully met all recruitment goals and signed a remarkable 35 pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists in her first 13 months onsite.

In her email, Smith shared with her mentor and former boss that she currently ran an award-winning local market recruiting firm, but longed to reconnect with her passion: personally working with the doctors, hospitals, and leaders who help children. Willson saw the potential immediately – she felt confident that Smith could positively change recruitment outcomes for SMG and CHCC. Before long, the group retained Smith to fill their hardest and most critical searches.

The working partnership wasn't initially optimal. Smith had to overcome the cynicism of SMG and hospital staff. Based on their past experience and lack of results, the group had become wary of recruiters. They were reluctant to trust her to make the changes and implement the processes that had led to the successful outcomes she had achieved for Willson at Egleston. Likewise, there was hesitancy to fully involve her in the facilitation and negotiation Smith knew from experience it would take to get the positions filled.

"I was a little bit skeptical, thinking, 'here we go again, with another recruiter,'" says Lilles. It took more than a year for Smith to fully gain the trust of the hospital's in-house recruiting consultant and administrators, but eventually, her persistence paid off. She initially met with the hospital's medical leadership to fully understand what the hospital and cities of Fresno and Modesto had to offer physicians. The meetings also served to flesh out what kind of experience and which traits candidates would need in order to succeed in the positions intangibles that other firms had failed to grasp. She also engaged the medical leadership every step of the way.

"Glenda took the time to see what the organization's needs were as a whole," says Dr. Devonna Kaji, SMG President and Medical Director of Pediatric Urology. "When she was looking for candidates for my practice, she was in constant contact. You felt like she was working 24/7 on your behalf." Through targeted research, ongoing recruitment and networking with physicians at children's hospitals and practices throughout the United States, Smith leveraged her twenty-three years of experience and expertise as well as her new team's specialization. She was ultimately able to identify and source the pediatric subspecialists available in a physician-short marketplace who could most successfully fill the openings for SMG.



## The Results

Smith immediately implemented an aggressive, ongoing marketing strategy. And in less than five months, the opening for a pediatric neurologist in the North Market clinic was filled by a specialist who is still practicing there over seven years later. In under ten months, she had successfully presented over 45 physicians or more than six candidates for each opening. She went on to sign not one, but four, pediatric urologists and two pediatric surgeons with more in process. Within two years, Smith successfully completed the searches assigned. Additionally, it took her just 90 days to complete the search for the Medical Director who would launch a successful, growing Maternal Fetal Medicine (MFM) program.

With its critical searches finally filled, the hospital was able to initiate completion of the construction of two additional OR rooms. In June 2011, SMG invited Smith to formally present her recruitment strategies to their board. Smith and Lourdine Skillin, who oversees the hospital's in-house recruitment efforts, discussed how they collaborated to fill the positions other firms had once said were "unfillable."

"Glenda has a unique way of becoming a part of the in-house recruitment team," Skillin says. "She is by far the most successful recruiter I have worked with. I am confident in her ability to find candidates for any position that may become available, whether it is staff physician, Medical Director or an Executive Leader. I would recommend Glenda to any medical institution that wants to be successful in their recruitment efforts."

"Great, great job," says Dr. Kaji. "I can't say enough. Glenda made a world of difference in terms of what's been needed in our practice for recruiting."

Paul Lilles agrees. "She's going to find the right doctor; she's not going to throw just anybody at you. I have high respect for her. I can't say that of other recruiters," he says.

Seven years later, Pediatric Search Partners has placed more than 70 pediatricians, pediatric subspecialists and Medical Directors as the primary recruiting source for Valley Children's. In that time, PSP has helped Valley Children's expansion substantially and through the growth, in February 2016, the Central California Emergency Medical Services (CEEMS) Agency designated Valley Children's Hospital as a Level II Pediatric Trauma Center, the only Pediatric Trauma Center in Central California.

"Glenda provides a boutique approach to recruiting, and we couldn't be happier. She is always available to the candidate and provides a personal touch which is missing in other recruiting firms. The results speak for themselves, as we have had incredible success recruiting outstanding physicians and filling difficult-to-fill physicians," says Dr. David Christensen, Chief Medical Officer for Valley Children's. "We can't recommend her highly enough."



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## About Pediatric Search Partners

Glenda Church Smith is a Principal of Pediatric Search Partners, a boutique search firm which focuses exclusively on recruitment for the pediatricians, pediatric subspecialists and leaders who are dedicated to providing children's healthcare.

An expert recruiter who has spent her career studying negotiation and the psychology of the recruitment process, Glenda's strength is finding the right "fit" between physicians and hospitals and facilitating bringing them together.

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