AAN Medical Student FAQs:

How can I best prepare for my neurology clerkship?
Like many third year clerkships, neurology offers an opportunity to learn and perfect useful skills that will be a part of all students’ toolkits regardless of the field of specialty they ultimately choose. Additionally, the neurology clerkship offers medical students invaluable practical experience in the exciting and complex world of treating patients with neurological disease. It can be intimidating to the uninitiated, but don’t worry! The purpose of all third year clerkships is providing hands-on opportunities to learn new skills and evolve in your medical training. Staff and residents understand that you are not a seasoned neurologist and don’t yet know all the aspects of neurology. As long as you approach your rotation with an open mind and a willingness to learn, you’ll find that the experienced are very willing to teach.

A great way to feel prepared is by understanding the basic neurologic exam. Know how to perform the exam correctly. Learning good techniques will ensure accurate evaluation of the patient; ask for feedback of your physical exam by your residents or staff. Creating a regular routine that you consistently use will aid in the memorization of technique to ensure that you cover all aspects of the neurological exam. Once you have a baseline of the above and have some familiarity with what is normal, you can then begin to recognize abnormal patterns. Don’t stress about trying to learn all of neurology in a month, this is a life-long process! Of course, remember that a positive attitude counts for a lot - don’t forget to have fun.

The neurology clerkship can also be an opportunity to really see if neurology is the specialty for you. A good piece of general advice for all students is to “wear the white coat” of every specialty, which means imagine yourself as a neurologist when you’re on neurology, or as a pediatrician when you are on pediatrics, etc. no matter how certain you think are of your final career path. It will help in generating motivation and interest to do well, but also give you an opportunity to try on specialties that you may have never considered.

Don’t think of neurology as a course you must pass, but more as a way to see if the specialty fits with your personality and interests. The rotation gives you the opportunity to meet faculty and residents who are passionate about neurology. Make sure your enthusiasm can be seen! Look up information on your patient’s disease or offer to present a short lecture on the disease; personalization is the best way to commit to memory what you are learning. Get to know your preceptors and don’t be afraid to ask their advice. The neurology clerkship is a great way to make contacts with faculty for future letters of recommendations.

Even for those students who end up in other specialties, the neurology clerkship provides an important foundation and opportunity to hone the neurological and other physical exam skills.

How can I get more involved in the field of neurology?
There are several ways to be involved in field of neurology. If your school does not offer a required clerkship in neurology, one option may be taking an elective at your school or during an away rotation in your third year or early fourth year.

The Student Interest Group in Neurology (SIGN) has many chapters at medical schools throughout the country and is eager for more participation! It is a great way to network with other students and faculty through involvement in activities, such as journal clubs, campus
events and volunteerism. SIGN meetings often have faculty or residents present at meetings to provide more insight into the specialty or help with career advice. You may even wish to run for office to gain leadership experience!

Another great resource is faculty or neurology residents at your school—approach them about any available opportunities. They may have a project that would be appropriate for medical student involvement. Be sure to set clear expectations with any research mentor regarding the time and energy you are able to devote to extra-curricular work. In addition to a research project, the faculty member can provide mentorship or guidance in your future endeavors.

Do medical students go to the AAN Annual Meeting?
There are many opportunities for medical students at the AAN’s Annual Meeting. In addition to the wide range of educational sessions, the annual SIGN meeting facilitates discussion between students at medical schools across the country and allows students to ask questions of clerkship and program directors, as well as residents. The AAN offers Medical Student Annual Meeting Scholarships; email Cheryl Alementi at calementi@aan.com for more information on these opportunities. If you are involved in research in the field of neurology, consider submitting an abstract or a case presentation. If your work is selected, you may be able to present an oral or poster presentation to others in your area of interest.

What classes and/or clerkships can best prepare me for a residency in neurology?
All clerkships help to prepare students for a career in neurology, just like the neurology clerkship helps to prepare you for work in other fields of medicine. Internal medicine and other inpatient rotations help foster skills necessary for working on a medical team. Utilize the time spent on general medicine rotations as an opportunity to see the broad spectrum of care and the way that neurology relates to other fields. Spending time in related fields like physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R) or outpatient orthopedics affords plenty of practice with the musculoskeletal examination and also gives perspective to the dedication required for rehabilitation after a neurological injury. Doing an elective in radiology would facilitate knowledge of imaging modalities that are commonly used in neurology. Electives in toxicology or emergency medicine could also help in exposure to the many neurological emergencies. Outpatient rotations in ophthalmology or otolaryngology offer important perspectives on common symptoms such as vision loss or dizziness.

What is the length of a neurology residency? What types of rotations are required?
Board certification in neurology requires completion of four-year residency. Typically, the first/intern year (PGY-1) is spent in medicine where one gains a general foundation, and the intern year is followed by neurology-specific residency training, which is 3 years (PGY-2 to PGY-4) in length. For pediatric neurology, you must complete 2 years of a general pediatrics residency prior to starting the neurology residency.

For adult neurology, your intern year can be either a transitional year or a preliminary year. Generally speaking, the transitional year provides more options for electives, where a preliminary year is more internal-medicine focused. The so-called “categorical” neurology residencies have their internship “tied” to the neurology program, which means that when you match at that neurology program, you also automatically match into that program’s internship. The benefits of being “tied” to a program include being able to learn the hospital and clinic system prior to starting your neurology
years. In addition, you meet residents from other specialties, which can be invaluable later in your residency. You can also choose to do a preliminary year at another institution. You can move to a place for just the year or to stay in your current location for an additional year.

The neurology residency can vary based on the particular program; however, to receive accreditation there are certain requirements that must be met by all programs, such as completion of a combination of inpatient & outpatient rotations. Examples include months in the neuro ICU, general neurology, stroke, emergency, psychiatry and child neurology. In addition to required months, all residencies offer opportunities for electives, as well as some component of a neurology-learning curriculum on topics including EEG, EMG, neurophysiology, and neuropathology.

**How competitive is neurology as residency?**
Although it varies from year-to-year, neurology is typically a competitive residency. However, on average, 97-98% of U.S. seniors have successfully matched into a neurology program on their rank list in recent years. Programs differ on their competitiveness and requirements; please see the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) site for current match statistics.

**Are there opportunities for research during a neurology residency?**
Absolutely! Nearly every program provides the opportunity for research. Most faculty members are working on projects and would enjoy having a resident participate. There are research fellowships available after residency. These are usually not advertised, but your faculty mentor can make you aware of these opportunities. At some programs, research is possible during electives or on a specific track. It is a good idea to ask whether a program has a research requirement during residency interviews. The AAN offers Medical Student Summer Research Scholarships; email Cheryl Alementi at calementi@aan.com for more information on these opportunities.

**What fellowship opportunities are available after neurology residency?**
There are several neurology fellowships. The most common is neurophysiology, which involves EMG and EEG. Other fellowships include pain, dementia, epilepsy, sleep, multiple sclerosis, movement disorders, neuromuscular, cerebrovascular, neurohospitalist, headache, neuro critical care, neuro-oncology, neuroradiology, neuro-ophthalmology, and neuro-otology.

**What are the lengths of fellowship training?**
Most fellowships last only 1 year. Some fellowships may be longer, depending on the program. Some programs can combine a fellowship with research, creating a 2 year program. Your faculty member should be able to direct you towards a program that fits your interests.

**What motivates people to go into neurology?**
Most people who go into neurology would describe themselves as analytical problem-solver who enjoy learning neuroanatomy and the complexity of the brain and nervous system. Others would cite satisfaction over being able to use the history and exam alone to localize lesions to a part of the central and/or peripheral nervous system. As technology continues to advance, the field of neurology is expanding to include more therapeutic options and is helping to discover answers to the mysteries of medicine.
What kind of lifestyles do neurologists enjoy?
The opportunities are nearly as diverse as medicine itself. Neurologists can find themselves running sleep clinics and reading EEGs or as part of a busy ED as a stroke specialist. Neurology provides the same options as most other specialties. Academic positions are available for those who want to continue in the academic setting, teaching and researching. Private practice opportunities can vary based on the group, hospital or even the community in which you practice. Some choose to open a general neurology practice while other focus on one of the many subspecialties mentioned above, such as movement disorders or headaches. Call schedule depends on the group practice and number of hospitals covered. For those who enjoy inpatient medicine, new trends in neuro-hospitalist medicine allow some to work exclusively in the hospital.

What is the typical day like as an inpatient/hospitalist neurologist? Outpatient neurologist? Do neurologists work in academic medical centers, private practices, or both? How does the salary of a neurologist compare to that of physicians in other specialties?
Most physicians still work primarily in the clinic and spend their afternoons/evening seeing hospital consults as requested with the assumption of following the patient until services are no longer required. In addition, if an emergent consult is requested, the physician must juggle outpatient and inpatient obligations. Most neurologists work purely in private practice or in the academic setting.

Neurology salary depends on several factors. Private practice typically earns more than academic medicine. Some regions of the United States earn more than others. Locations that are short on neurologists will offer more for your services, as compared to a large city with plenty of neurologists.

Neurologists are not often called upon to perform a lot of procedures, but pay is reasonable as compared with internal medicine specialists.

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