Residency Application Process Tips

Applying for residency can be an anxiety-provoking and exciting adventure in the next step of your professional career. The following provides some helpful tips on how to make the process as smooth as possible.

**Step 1. Selecting Residency Programs to Which You Will Apply**

There are more residency programs in the United States than anyone can possibly interview for. Most people choose a residency program for a multitude of reasons, but program strength and location are often major factors in the decision process. Reasons for choosing a specific location can be based on family, spouse and his/her job, or other personal reasons. Websites like NRMP or FREIDA can help you generate a list of residency programs in various locations.

Once you have a large pool to choose from, talk to other residents, faculty, and even other medical students. Contacting recent alumni from your institution who matched in neurology can also be helpful. See where they applied and why they chose their particular program. Each residency program’s website can be very helpful. Most will not provide details about the application process but will contain other useful information such as number of residents, diversity of faculty interests, and program attributes. Not all programs have faculty trained in every neurological subspecialty, so be sure to ask about this if you have a particular interest within the field.

Your future career goals also will help to guide your residency application process, as many programs attract students with similar goals in regard to academics vs. private practice. Be sure to also consider the type of hospital(s) in which residents work. A hospital in the city will likely have a different patient population than one in a more rural area. Depending on your interest, one may be preferable to another.

**Step 2. Applying to Residency Programs**

Like many things in life, earlier is better, and applying to residency is no exception. Work on your personal statement and CV before ERAS (Electronic Residency Application Service) opens. Give the individuals from whom you have requested a letter of recommendation plenty of time to write your letter. Your medical school dean and the ERAS system will help guide you through the application process.

When asking for a letter of recommendation, use faculty that know you best. These individuals will be the ones who write the most personal letter about you. A lukewarm letter from a world-renowned professor who has only met you a handful of times will carry less weight than a detailed recommendation letter from someone who sees you on a daily basis.

The personal statement is a way to let the program know who you are as an individual. The programs have seen your statistics on paper and now want to know what your interests are and why you are choosing Neurology. The personal statement also provides a jumping off point for discussion during your interview day. Be prepared to talk about anything that you include in your personal statement, as you will likely get asked about it along the way.
There is no single way to write a personal statement but there are many wrong ways to go about it. Ask faculty or your advisor to look at your personal statement to make sure it’s appropriate and conveys your intended message.

**Step 3. Accepting and Declining Interviews**

Programs will contact you by email to offer an interview. Most will give you several dates to choose from during the interview season. It can be difficult to juggle several interviews and sometimes, you may have to decline an interview because of scheduling. If you are unable to participate, let the program know in a timely fashion. Typically an email or phone call to the program coordinator is sufficient. If you accept an interview, but change your mind later, let the program coordinator know as soon as possible. This allows the program to open up the slot for another applicant. Be courteous and professional in all of your interactions with residency programs.

**Step 4. Going on the Interview Trail**

The day prior to meeting the program’s faculty, most programs will offer you a chance to have dinner with current residents. This is a great way to get to know them better. Keep an eye out for how many residents show up, especially PGY2s—they will be your senior residents when you are the junior resident, and therefore should have a vested interest in the incoming residents. Also, look at how the residents get along with each other. Can you see yourself working with them?

The dinner is also a great time to ask questions you may not be comfortable asking faculty.

The following day is devoted to tours of the hospital and meeting the faculty. Most programs just want to get to know you better. You have “passed” their screening test on paper and now are being evaluated for how you’ll fit with their program. The interview day is also an opportunity for you to see if this program fits you as well. Ask questions about the program’s education curriculum and lecture series, as well as how residents perform on the RITE and board examinations. Do residents from this program get offers in their top fellowship and career locations once they have finished their training?

After your interview day is over, write down some notes on the program. Hospitals and programs can begin to blend together after a while and you might forget details later. These notes will become helpful when you rank your programs. In addition, feel free to contact the program coordinator with any lingering questions.

**Step 5. Ranking and Match**

After completing your interviews, review your notes from each program and rank them from most to least desirable. Take into consideration every aspect of the program, including residents, faculty, and location. There is no wrong or right way to rank programs and everyone’s list will be different. If you have questions or concerns, don’t hesitate to contact the NRMP or talk to your advisor for help. Best of luck to you!

Prepared by: American Academy of Neurology Undergraduate Education Subcommittee members
Carrie Butterly (medical student), Lauren Jansons (medical student), Heidi Woessner (resident).

July 2012