

**The Residency Interview**  
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**A Few Basic Facts**

- *Hiring decisions are made in the first 30 seconds of the interview – the balance of the time is used to justify the decision.*
- The most qualified person for the job probably won't get the offer if s/he interviews poorly.
- People will not remember everything you say, but they will remember how they felt when you spoke!!!!
- The interview process must get your attention if you want to ensure you get the residency you want.
- **You** will be assessing your compatibility with the program; **You** will be assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the program; **They** will be confirming and expanding upon the information in your application; **They** will be assessing your compatibility with the program

**The Perfect Way to Interview**

- No such thing, many ways are successful
- You will bring your own unique perspective and personality to the interviewing situation.
- Be clear, concise and natural.

**Things to do in the next few months**

**1. Practice Interviewing**

- a) Practice will make you calmer, more organized, and help you sound better during the real thing - practice with friends, classmates, etc.
- b) **MOCK INTERVIEW** - Ask a specialty advisor, a faculty member, or the Office of Student Affairs staff to conduct it.
  - i) Prepare as if it were a real interview - review your answers to specific questions.
  - ii) Carry copies of your CV, personal statement and transcripts, your list of questions you wish to have answered, and a note pad with you as you would for your interview (use a nice leather portfolio).

**2. Make Sure You Know Yourself**

- a) Make a list of your top strengths, goals, values, accomplishments and abilities to use as a general reference for all interview questions. This will provide your answers for a majority of the questions you are asked.
- b) **TOP 5 PLAN** - go into every interview with 5 key things you want a program to know about you. These 5 things should answer the questions: What makes you a good candidate? What makes you unique?
- c) Review the questions you are likely to be asked to help formulate your plan.
- d) Create a checklist of things you want/need in a residency program:
- e) Rank your needs/wants in order of importance to you.
- f) Assign a score to each program immediately after your visits for each of your wants/needs.
- g) At the end, compare your scores, notes, and information from the various programs.

**3. Review your own medical school file**

- a) Review your application, personal statement and curriculum vitae and prepare yourself to discuss anything that you've mentioned on them, including any research that you've done.
- b) Never lie or overstate something in your file—it is very likely to harm you later
- c) If you have something questionable/problematic now is the time to prepare how you will address it when asked.
- d) Make sure you can reasonably describe your interests, research, experiences so the interviewer

actually believes you when you speak (you would be surprised how often people can't!).

#### **4. Research Programs and EM in general**

- a) Research the program as much as possible before you go so that you will be able to target your questions for that program, rather than doing a generic interview.
- b) Check to see if any graduates of your medical school are there, and if so, consider getting in touch with them.
- c) Do some research on the latest issues in the specialty that you're interested in, including what types of people they're looking for.
- d) Different programs may have different priorities - leadership, community involvement, research, or clinical abilities.
- e) **\*\*Know what is unique about the program \*\***; Review the webpage for the program
- f) Be aware of any recent changes in the program/department
- g) Know something about the faculty/research in the department; key in on any similar research interests, medical schools.
- h) Write down all the faculty names with a brief line about their interests (especially department and residency leadership). Take this sheet with you to your interview day and review their interests the night before and right before you interview.
- i) FREIDA, internet, Google the program/hospital
- j) Know the geography of the program, i.e. remote clinical sites
- k) Research the city/community if you have never been there

#### **5. Think about/Purchase Your Interview Outfit.**

- a) A residency interview is a job interview, and the appropriateness of your dress reflects a sense of being in touch with the world.
- b) Your choice of a residency, and their choice of a candidate to whom they can entrust patients, is serious business. For men and for women, suits are serious clothes and are appropriate for interviews.
- c) Failure to wear professional-looking clothes might or might not cost you the residency slot, but it certainly will distract the interviewer.
- d) Business schools impart lots of information to their graduates about how to dress for job interviews; medical schools do not. But don't be fooled. Although you may not be going for job in banking, you are interviewing for a professional position.
- e) Dress Code: dull, professional, conservative, tasteful, comfortable, well-fitting.
- f) Look the part: Have the appearance of a successful, mature physician, not a medical student.
- g) Men should wear a suit, not sport coat or khakis.
  - i) Navy or gray, solid or pinstripe
  - ii) White or pale-blue shirt
  - iii) Conservative tie: solid, stripes, or small pattern (red or navy).
  - iv) Keep jewelry to a minimum if at all.
  - v) Short hair, preferably no goatees and tasteful facial hair.
- h) Women should wear a suit—skirt or pants are acceptable.
  - i) Classic, solid colors: medium to dark gray, medium to dark blue, or black.
  - ii) Simple white or cream top buttoned up high.
  - iii) Simple, comfortable, short heeled, closed toe shoes in blue or black.
  - iv) Keep jewelry to a minimum and tasteful.
  - v) Make-up and perfume work best when they are NOT NOTICED.

#### **6. Prepare a list of questions.**

- a) Based on the needs and wants you outlined for yourself earlier, brainstorm a list of information you wish to find out during your visit.

- b) Ask INTERESTING and UNIQUE questions!! The conversation will go better.
- c) Questions should be divided into those for the program director, those for other faculty, and those for the residents.
- d) Make sure you understand why you are asking the questions and that the answers are really important to making your decision.
- e) Questions for the PD:
  - i) What is the program's philosophy?
  - ii) What makes this program so unique?
  - iii) Is there elective time and how is it used?
  - iv) Is the program changing and why? Do you foresee any changes in the next three/four years?
  - v) How do you evaluate the program and what is done with those evaluations (examples)? Accreditation?
  - vi) What are the research opportunities/requirements?
  - vii) Quality of current residents? Have any left the program recently?
  - viii) What is the success of graduates: board scores, help finding jobs/fellowships, types of jobs/location?
  - ix) How well do the faculty and residents get along?
  - x) Do the residents really run the room?
  - xi) What areas need improvement? What are the greatest strengths of your program?
  - xii) Do you assist graduates in finding a job?
- f) General questions:
  - i) What are the clinical, non-clinical, and administrative responsibilities of the residents?
  - ii) Status of the program and hospital: Have any house staff left the program?
  - iii) How are residents evaluated? How often? By whom? How may they give feedback?
  - iv) Teaching opportunities?
  - v) What is the patient mix and what are the community demographics?
  - vi) To what extent do residents manage patients? Supervise other residents??
- g) Create a list you wish to specifically ask residents, such as:
  - i) Why did you choose this program?
  - ii) Where else did you apply?
  - iii) What do the residents like most/least here?
  - iv) What do you think the future direction is?
  - v) How available/supportive are the attendings/residency director?
  - vi) What do you feel are the strengths/weaknesses of this program?
  - vii) What do residents generally do with elective time?
  - viii) Are you receiving adequate feedback?
  - ix) How are the attendings to work with?
  - x) What is the patient population I will see?
  - xi) How are the nurses/techs?
  - xii) What would be the one thing you would like to change most?
  - xiii) What is the mix of married and unmarried residents?
  - xiv) Do the residents socialize as a group?
  - xv) What is the racial/ethnic/gender breakdown of residents?
  - xvi) Are you happy? Was this a good match for you?
  - xvii) What is the relationship between this program and other specialties?
  - xviii) How are the schedules?hours?
  - xix) How are complaints handled?
  - xx) Moonlighting opportunities?
  - xxi) Do you like the city? What is the community seem like? What is the climate like? What kind of transportation is available?

- xxii) What is the access to theater, movies, sporting facilities, the great outdoors?  
xxiii) What are the financial implications of living here?

## **The Interview Offer**

### **1. Timing of Offers and Interviews**

- a) Review your schedule ahead of time so you know when you are free for interviewing. Most programs interview November thru January, some into February. Some will interview weeks that others won't.
- b) Some programs will start making offers quite early; others may be well into November. Depends on the program, the number of applicants, and the importance of letters of recommendation and MSPE in making decisions.
- c) If at all possible, don't interview at most desirable program first
- d) It is a good idea to get a few interviews under your belt before you go to the ones that you regard as the most important.
- e) After a 10-12 interviews you will be pretty worn out. Therefore, scheduling your most prized interviews in the middle might promote the best results.
- f) A study of EM applicants done several years ago actually found that interview timing had no correlation with matching—shows that you may not actually know if a program is for you until you visit.

### **2. Scheduling Interviews**

- a) Response
  - i) Remember that your interview starts with the first phone call.
  - ii) Respond to programs ASAP so that you can have your choice of interview dates
  - iii) Some programs will make more offers than they have slots
  - iv) It is okay to try and move things in order to make only one trip to an area, but be careful about how important you make a particular program feel or not feel.
  - v) Call and confirm your interview a week before. Confirm place and time.
- b) Night Before Events
  - i) Find out when these are scheduled when you are making your plans
  - ii) Make every effort to find a way to attend these for any program you are seriously considering (frankly you should be seriously considering any program you are traveling to interview at).

### **3. Canceling Interviews**

- a) Canceling is not a big deal if done early and in a professional fashion; most of us don't even care why you are canceling.
- b) Shouldn't be done less than a week away from interview date unless it TRULY is an emergency
- c) ABSOLUTELY DO NOT NO SHOW, CANCEL DURING THE NIGHT BEFORE, CANCEL BY WITHDRAWING FROM ERAS. This is a very small world, most of us talk, most of us have long memories and this WILL likely come back to haunt you at some point in the future.
- d) Appropriate etiquette is to cancel by phone or email as early as possible (preferably at least 2 weeks ahead of time).
- e) Remember, we prepare for these interviews and you don't want to be the person who wasted our time.
- f) Also, if you cancel early someone else may be able to come in your place.

### **4. Travel and Transportation/ Plan Your Trip Well**

- a) *Housing.* Some students find it helpful to make prior arrangements for housing in residents' quarters. The coordinator can usually help you with this. Saves money, gives you access to some more info from that resident. Remember that you should consider this time the same as interview time though.
- b) *Extra time to visit.* If you have the time, stay an extra day to talk with residents or visit the ED. Time and again, respondents reported the value of information gained from this source.

- c) If you are not familiar with an area try to take some extra time to explore and try to determine if you could actually live there.
- d) *Don't plan late afternoon/evening flights if at all possible.* Early morning flights are the most likely to be on time and leave you alternatives if there are problems.
- e) *Expect delays.* Remember interview season is in the middle of winter and you should expect delays; try not to bunch too many interviews closely together just in case you get delayed.

## 5. What to Pack

- a) Consider carry on only or at least for your interview suit.
- b) Be prepared for bad weather - always have an umbrella and overcoat with you.
- c) Take casual, but nice clothes for any evening events.
- d) Take an extra shirt in case you spill something.
- e) Bring along a nice leather folder for copies of CV and any questions/notes you have. Multiple copies of your CV, pen, pencil.
- f) Directions and contact phone numbers
- g) Any information you have on the program
- h) Papers/articles published
- i) Any updates to MSPE or transcript
- j) Interview checklist

## The Interview Day

### 1. Night Before Events

- a) Important to attend if at all possible
- b) Consider it part of the interview if it is offered
- c) Don't drink too much, act too familiar, or say things you could regret.
- d) Review the program ahead of time
- e) Know who you are dealing with
- f) Review your questions
- g) Make sure you know where you need to be the next day, if possible check it out the night before
- h) Get enough sleep; get up and get there early

### 2. The Interview Day Schedule

- a) Okay to ask ahead of time what the interview day will be like, who you meet with, etc
- b) Intro to Program (whole group)
- c) Attend conference
- d) Lunch
- e) Interviews
- f) Tour

### 3. First Impressions

- a) **Your Arrival Starts the Interview:** anywhere within a couple of blocks you may encounter someone affiliated with the program.
- b) Make sure you have good directions and know how long it will take to get there.
- c) Be early at least 15 minutes; Call if you are going to be late
- d) Turn off cell phone and/or pager
- e) You are interviewing with EVERYONE with whom you come in contact
- f) Plan your day so that you don't have to leave early
- g) Show respect for everyone; the receptionist's opinion can make or break your offer. The coordinator's opinion may be the most important of the day.
- h) Remember the Four A's While Waiting to Interview: Attention, Attitude, Action, Affect (If you spend all your free time talking to another applicant about another program it will be noticed).

### 4. What are they looking for?

- a) Confidence
- b) Commitment to the specialty- demonstrate this with knowledge about the specialty
- c) Enthusiasm for their program
- d) The “right fit”/ “night-shift” test
- e) Ability to talk about yourself and what is on your CV/ Good communication skills
- f) Motivation

## 5. Goals of the Interview

- a) Every interview is different, so be prepared for anything. All interviews, however, have a beginning, middle, and conclusion that will probably include:
  - i) *Small Talk*: This isn't time to just smile and nod. Whether the topic is the weather, current events, or sports, you're expected to participate. You should spend the next few months getting up to date on current events, see a movie, read a non-medical book, read the paper regularly.
  - ii) *Discussion of your qualifications/experience, Your questions*: Review commonly asked questions and tips on how to prepare for your interview. "Do you have any questions for us?" is an interview question. Prepare questions that show your knowledge and interest in the company in advance so you are ready.
  - iii) *Conclusion*: You might have a chance to make closing remarks. Touch on qualifications you didn't get a chance to discuss or explain why you are excited about the position. Don't forget to thank the interviewer in person as well!
- b) Starts with a handshake and good eye contact
  - i) *The Art of Shaking Hands*: A good handshake demonstrates confidence. Make it firm, and look your interviewer in the eye. Practice until it feels natural.
  - ii) Don't be afraid to smile.

## 6. The Questions - What Interviewers May Ask

Make a list of potential questions you may be asked. Practice your answers ahead of time. The following is a list of potential questions that may aid you in your preparation. Avoid sounding rehearsed though.

- How are you today? (there are NO innocent questions)
- Do you have any questions? (yes...)
- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Why are you interested in this specialty? (#1 question asked)
- What other specialties did you consider?
- Why are you interested in our program?
- What are you looking for in a program? Where else have you interviewed?
- Why should we choose you? What can you contribute to our program?
- How well do you feel you were trained to start as an intern?
- Describe your learning style.
- Tell me about... item(s) on your CV or transcript, past experience, time off, etc.?
- Can you tell me about this deficiency on your record? (do not discuss if you are not asked)
- What do you see yourself doing in five (ten) years?
- What do you think about...the current and future state of healthcare, this specialty, etc.?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- Present an interesting case that you had.
- Tell me about a patient encounter that taught you something.
- What would you do if you knew one of your more senior residents was doing something wrong?
- Which types of patients do you work with most effectively? (least effectively?)

- How do you normally handle conflict? Pressure?
- What to do think about what is happening in...? (non-medical current event questions)
- Teach me something non-medical in five minutes.
- Tell me a joke. (keep it simple and tasteful)
- What if you do not match?
- Can you think of anything else you would like to add? (yes...)
- Describe your best encounter with a patient
- Describe your worst or most difficult encounter with a patient
- Here is a clinical scenario--tell me what you would do next
- Tell me about the last book/journal article you read
- What excites you about medicine?
- What concerns do you have about choosing a career in Emergency Medicine?
- When you are given a problem, how do you go about solving it?
- What can you bring to our program?
- Describe a person/physician you admire
- If you could not enter the field of medicine what would be your second choice? Why?
- Last non-medical book or movie you saw?
- What characteristics do you think a successful resident should have?
- Tell me about yourself?(Keep your reply short)
- What would you consider your greatest strength or weakness?
- What are you looking for in a residency?

## 7. Illegal Questions

- a) Questions You Shouldn't Be Asked
  - i) What is your religion/sexual preference?
  - ii) Do you have any health problems?
  - iii) Are you married? Are you planning on having children?
  - iv) Have you ever been arrested? Not illegal to ask if you have been convicted of a felony
  - v) How old are you?
- b) National Study
  - i) All applicants applying during the 2001-2002 through ERAS. Applicants were asked to recall if they experienced questions relating to various topics including marital status, age, and ethnicity, and if they are planning to have children.
  - ii) Of the 29068 applicants, 12560 returned a completed survey (43.2%).
    - (1) During their interviews:
      - (a) 67.9% were asked about marital status
      - (b) 42.1% if they had children
      - (c) 21.3% intend to have children
      - (d) 23.0% about their age
      - (e) 30.5% about their ethnicity
      - (f) 17.1% about their religion
      - (g) 1.2% about their sexual preference.
    - (2) 85.3% reported some form of illegal question during their interviews.
    - (3) Women were more likely than men to be asked questions about their plans for having children (25.8% vs. 17.4%, (OR 1.65)).
    - (4) Applicants to surgical specialties had a higher risk of being asked illegal questions than other applicants.
- c) Specialty Specific
  - i) In 2000, a study of applicants to urology programs identified significant violations among the 230 responders (44.3% response rate). 100% of women applicants were asked about marital status and

- 60% were asked about family planning.
- ii) In 2001, emergency medicine applicants were surveyed and identified a number of serious violations in 85.9% of the 184 respondents.
  - d) What is not illegal?
    - i) Ethical Scenarios.
    - ii) What if?
    - iii) How would you react?
  - e) What if you get asked an illegal question?
    - i) You don't want to alienate your interviewer by refusing to answer the question!
    - ii) The interviewer may not know the question is a problem (young or inexperienced interviewer)!
    - iii) They may not be trying to ask it in a negative way. Are you married?—maybe the job market is good, great place to buy a house, good schools. Try to determine their reason for asking before you get upset.
    - iv) Try to reword the question and not directly answer it if it makes you uncomfortable! Are you married?---Are you asking if my personal life would interfere with my work?

### **8. Tips for Handling Difficult Questions**

- a) It's okay to say, "Let me think about that for a minute..."
- b) Concentrate on any area that most worries you when preparing. You can be sure you will be asked.
- c) Think before you answer. There is nothing wrong with pausing briefly before answering
- d) Don't become defensive--it happened and this is how I have worked to correct the problem
- e) Be brief and respond to the question asked in a factual, non-emotional way. Do not give any more information than necessary
- f) Ask the interviewer to restate the question if you don't understand it. Try to determine what the interviewer is trying to find out.
- g) Never lie or overstate
- h) Anticipate the difficult questions; prepare your responses in advance; and rehearse

### **9. What questions do you have?**

- a) This is not a time to ask about vacation or the quality of the on-call room. Any of these issues can be asked of residents. Please be aware that questions you ask of the residents do not fall on deaf ears. These are not your buddies and you should maintain a level of formality with them also. If you say something inappropriate, the interview committee will hear about it.
- b) Do You Have Any Questions for Us? YES!!!
  - i) Don't ever say NO; if you don't have questions, why are you there??
  - ii) If you can't think of anything—ask something you may think know the answer to
  - iii) Sometimes you will be surprised by the different answers you get
  - iv) Better to ask a question you know the answer to than not to ask at all—then you seem uninterested!!

### **10. Questions Not to Ask**

- a) These are topics you should typically not ask about during the interview. Most of this information will be in the packet they send you or covered in an introductory meeting. If not, it is better to contact the institution's Graduate Education office.
  - i) Salary
  - ii) Benefits
  - iii) Vacation
  - iv) Maternity leave arrangements
- b) What About "Lifestyle."
  - i) The medical profession continues to debate the advantages and disadvantages of the intensity of the residency demands and schedules. Long resident work hours, sleep deprivation, high stress levels, relationship interruptions -- these are somewhat par for the course in a typical residency program, but of legitimate concern nonetheless -- particularly as you may think about your now or future spouse or children.

- ii) It's appropriate to ask about call schedules such as "How often will I be taking call" or "What are the expectations for a resident..." But too many questions about time off will make you look like you're picking your residency on that basis, which does not speak well to the program. It's a fine balance.

## **11. Wrap It Up**

- a) Tell them something about why you want them or why they should want you
- b) "My interests/qualities seem to match with this program"

## **After the Interview**

### **1. Your Thoughts on the Day**

- a) Go back to your room and immediately write down your impressions of the interview. After a few interviews, you will tend to start forgetting what happened where.
- b) Write a description or make a list of what you liked and didn't like, and *do it right after the interview* because you won't remember later.

### **2. Thank You Notes**

- a) Some people expect it, others pay no attention. Try to find out what the typical is from the residents as far as follow up and return visits.
- b) Follow up your interview with a note of thanks -- but not one that sounds like a form letter. Make sure that you sound genuinely interested.
- c) Check and recheck for errors before you send; especially if you are copying and pasting some info from one to another. We have all gotten ones that have another name or program mentioned in them.
- d) Take blank note cards with you to write after the interview when you still remember the conversations. You can do these on the plane while your conversations are fresh in your mind
- e) Make notes personal (use the names of interviewers) and use key points to remind the interviewer of your time with him/her
- f) Use professional stationary. Thank you cards or e-mails are probably equivalent
- g) You should send to everyone you interviewed with, the program director, the division head, the coordinators that helped set up your day

## **12. How You Are Evaluated**

- a) The interviewer evaluates you based on your qualifications (i.e., skills, education, experience) and your "fit" (i.e., your personality; could they picture themselves working with you?).
- b) Your interest in the program right after and between that time and ranking can change some of their thoughts about you.

## **Some Final Tips**

### **1. Make sure to:**

- a) Not ramble.
- b) Listen to the questions asked - make sure you understand what is being asked. Then answer the question that was asked and don't add too much loosely-related information.
- c) Be comfortable with pauses, silence - stay poised and confident.
- d) Sound fresh every time - be prepared to answer the same question 20+ times throughout the entire interview process.
- e) Smile! - highly underrated; often forgotten when nervous and tense.
- f) Watch your facebook page, take it down if necessary
- g) Google yourself and see what comes up
- h) Dress professionally ; this is not time for a fashion statement
- i) Always speak positively about your med school and where you rotated.
- j) Consider why you are interviewing somewhere. Don't spend your money to go if you don't do your best to make a good impression. You want THEM to rate you highly. How you rate them is

up to you.

- k) Have a plan for your future career. You want them to write “focused, mature, energetic, enthusiastic” on the form they fill out.
- l) Direct each question to the appropriate interviewer (i.e. program funding to the director and call schedules to the residents).
- m) Investigate each year of residency; students often direct their focus only on the first year.
- n) Value your impressions of the program and the people, and keep track of those feelings about the interview to assess how suitable the fit is between you and the program.
- o) Be wary of programs that do not allow you to interact with residents

## **2. Please Do Not....**

- a) Talk badly about other programs, faculty or applicants.
- b) Try to hide something that is in your record.
- c) Lie or overstate.
- d) BE RUDE to the support staff, fellows, anyone you meet.
- e) Fall asleep in conferences if you are expected to attend one.
- f) Focus too hard on how much you work.
- g) Make excuses.
- h) Spend time talking up another program to an applicant.
- i) Ask a faculty member too much information about another program they trained at because you really liked that program.

## **Remember**

### ***THIS IS A JOB INTERVIEW!!!***

There is a ***BIG*** Difference Between a Thoughtful Response and a Canned Answer...

You are picking the program that works for you, try not to pay too much attention to other applicants’ opinions—they may be looking for something else.

Have a clear idea of who you are and what you want!

If your hands are shaking put them behind your back!

ENJOY!!!