

Match reflections: looking back, looking ahead

The power of shared, collective experiences in residency

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Residency is HARD. Internship is particularly HARD for more reasons than I can write here. In a single year, an intern is transformed from a recently graduated medical student, likely with a sense of imposter syndrome, to a capable doctor caring for complex patients and who will soon lead other recently graduated medical students. This transformation requires tremendous mental and physical toughness, commitment and drive. But, I believe, it also requires the support, comradery, and shared experiences of their colleagues.

I vividly remember my internship. It was HARD, but when I think back many years to moments that year, I still smile. I remember being paired with PM for multiple months. Each morning, after a long call night, he would sing to me, inspiring me to start another day on the wards no matter how tired I was. I recall one of my residents, PB, who upon waking me after a middle-of-the-night nap, would say, "I have a new friend for you," reminding me of the privilege I had to learn from a new patient. I think of the conversations I had with LC, about how we'd help each other when we were old and gray. If it wasn't for the support of my residency family, I don't know how I would have made it through that year and be able to reflect so fondly on the experience.

When I think of this year's Match, I worry that future interns didn't get the opportunity to experience what it would be like to be a part of our residency family. I wonder: Did they sense the culture of the place they will call home for the next three years, will they be happy, will the program be the right fit for them, will they find the people who will help them not just finish, but flourish?

I understand more so than ever how important this is. Because of the isolation of COVID-19, my own intern advisees have mourned the loss of the connectedness they sought and expected. They hope the future holds opportunities to get to know their colleagues – the people they expected to bond with, to help them thrive and share the uniqueness of being an intern. They chose to join our program for many reasons, but many of them said it's the people who solidified their choice.

You may believe that it's not that important to visit a program since you're not meeting your future colleagues on the interview day. I firmly believe every place has its own culture and uniqueness. Medical students are looking for a place that will meet their individual educational needs and an environment where they will thrive. Program leadership can attend to educational needs but thriving is dependent on relationships with colleagues and becoming part of a residency family. Applicants choose programs where they feel they will belong. Our residents at Brown are true friends and colleagues. They stand up for each other, support each other, learn from each other, and become excellent physicians together, not trying to outshine each other. I believe prospective applicants choose us because they sense this. The culture continues year after year by attracting applicants looking for the same things.

Certainly, leveling the playing field is important. No one traveled this year. A lot of money was saved. This is particularly important for those with fewer financial resources. There are, however, other ways of leveling the playing field. Interventions like limiting the number of programs an individual

can apply to and supporting travel scholarships could also work towards enhancing equity while helping applicants find the right home for the next three years. Another option would be to plan visits for after-interview days. The visit could be purely for the applicant to get a feeling for the culture of the program without having any bearing on the application process. Applicants would only visit those programs they are highly considering and would have the opportunity to interact with their future residency family.

I know, through technology, we did our best to put our best foot forward, to show who we are and highlight the "personality" and culture of our residency program. I just hope that was enough to provide prospective interns the sense of whether the place they chose is the place where they will thrive and find their residency family. ❖

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