Introduction
The interview is one of the most important parts of the residency match process for your advisee and is critical in resident selection by the residency programs. According to the NRMP Program Director Survey, the interview is regularly rated as the most important factor in ranking applicants for the program.

It is during the interview that a program will decide if the great candidate that they imagined from the application is someone that they will want to train for the next four years. Program directors take the interview process very seriously and dedicate a lot of time and resources to the interview days.

The interview is also critical for the student to evaluate programs and this should be discussed with the advisee. Students should be prepared to take notes and review the pros and cons of various programs after the interview process is complete in order to formulate a rank list that reflects their top priorities in programs.

In general, it is important to remind students that if they have been granted an interview, the program is very seriously considering them for a residency position, and they are on even ground with other applicants. The following are things to consider when advising students before, during and after the interview.

Before the Interview
Preparation for the interview is extremely important. It is highly recommended that students complete several mock interviews with faculty members in order to practice answering questions, evaluate interview demeanor and speech habits, and work out nerves. Some students may have attributes that call for more mock interviews than others, and these students should be encouraged to reach out to several faculty for additional mock interviews. In general, a 20-minute interview with 10 minutes of feedback is sufficient when faculty are considering scheduling advisees for mock interviews.

Students should be encouraged to prepare responses to difficult questions about their application, such as time away, course failures or other factors that may require special consideration. In addition, if an item is listed in the student’s application, they should be prepared to discuss it in detail. As an example, a one-hour volunteer experience during the second year of medical school may be asked about if it is on the application, and the student should be able to speak to that experience. Similarly, students should be very familiar with any research or scholarly work that they have on their application and they should be able to answer questions regarding methodology and findings. Preparation for these questions beforehand is essential. Students should be encouraged to consider their strengths and weaknesses and be able to speak authentically and humbly about both of those subjects.

A list of commonly asked questions that students should be prepared for is in Box 1.

Box 1
Commonly asked interview questions:
- Who has been influential in your life?
- How did you become interested in medicine? In ob-gyn? In our program?
- What strengths do you bring to this residency program?
- What are your plans for the future?
- What is an example of a failure in your life and how did you overcome that?
- What activities do you do to maintain balance in your life?
- What role did you play in the research projects listed on your CV? What is your understanding of the major findings?
- What role did you play in the extracurricular items listed on your CV?
- How do you explain any time gaps on your CV?
- How do you explain any weaknesses in your application?
Things to review with the student before the interview day:

- Whatever the program, the student should act as though it is their very top choice on the interview day. This does not mean that they say that during the interview, but rather they should have the mental outlook that the program is their dream program. This will help them deliver a top-notch interview.
- During the interview, students should be on their absolute best behavior. Be humble while also being outgoing. Students should present themselves as warm, professional and engaged. They should avoid inconsistencies in responses or remarks to interviewers.
- Being familiar with the details of the residency program is an important way to show interest. Students should be encouraged to check the department website, review any information about the residency program that is readily available, and know the program strengths, size and teaching site(s).
- Students should be encouraged to reach out to former medical school graduates who are now residents at programs where they are interviewing. In addition, if it is possible for students to know with whom they will be interviewing it is useful to have some background on their interviewer, such as area of interest, role in the department, past publications or noteworthy professional activity.
- There may be a skills assessment component to an interview. Therefore, if there is extra time, it may be useful to encourage students to practice such skills as knot tying, suture handling or even basic laparoscopic skills. Students may also be asked to interview in a group situation, where they should be reminded to be respectful of their colleagues while also contributing to the discussion.
- Behavioral interviewing is also more popular. Preparation for this can be helpful and includes thinking about a challenging ethical situation or personal strengths and weaknesses. In behavioral interviewing, students are given a scenario and asked how they would behave in that particular situation. For example, “If a student was in the OR and the attending was about to cut the ureter, what would you do?” Programs are trying to select students with certain personal characteristics such as teamwork, honesty and idealism. This can be facilitated with behavioral interview questions.
- Interview scheduling can be very difficult, but it is useful to advise students not to schedule their top choice program as a first interview if this is avoidable. Getting familiar with the interview process and dispelling nervous jitters can be very helpful prior to attending an interview at a top choice program. Conversely, towards the end of the interview season students can become fatigued, so it also can be useful to avoid having top choice programs be the last interview.
- Having a specific interview calendar can be useful for students to keep track of interview commitments as well as travel needs. This should be encouraged to avoid scheduling mishaps and missed interviews.
- Students should also be advised to be mindful of possible delays and travel time when scheduling interviews. Investing in TSA Precheck can be useful for students to avoid long security lines when they have tight travel schedules. If a student is going to be late for an interview or will need to cancel the interview for any reason, this should be communicated promptly to the program manager or other individuals responsible for interview coordination at the program.
- Students should be encouraged to plan a conservative and tidy appearance in clothes that they feel comfortable wearing. When thinking about footwear, it is important to remember that interviews often may include walking between buildings or a tour of the hospital.

At the Interview

Much preparation can be done before the interview day. However, students should be advised regarding tips for conduct at the interview itself. A prior survey of program directors indicated that they feel that the following factors displayed by candidates during the interview were very important:

- Interaction with house staff
- Interpersonal skills
- Interaction with faculty
- Interaction with departmental administrative staff
- Professionalism
- Feedback from current residents

The following are all important things to review with advisees regarding the interview day:

- Students should treat the entire visit to the program as an interview and be respectful...
Students should be encouraged to attend any prearranged social events for the interview if possible, as these are invaluable to both get a sense of the program and to allow the program to see the student in a less formal setting. This experience should be viewed as part of the interview as students will likely be observed and what they say or do may be directly reported to the program director. Attire for social events should be appropriate for a casual professional situation. Other applicants should be viewed as future colleagues and not competition. Collegial interaction should be reviewed with the student.

Students should be on time or early for their interview and should be encouraged to know how to get to the interview location, perhaps practicing the day before if time allows. Familiarity with parking options and specific interview location should be emphasized. If the student will be arriving late for some unexpected reason, they should be sure to call the Program Manager to notify them. Having names and phone numbers readily available is important.

Students should be reminded to relax and be themselves without being too familiar or casual with faculty or residents. Casual comments or slang should be avoided. During the interview itself students should remain attentive and animated, avoiding the appearance of being fatigued or indifferent.

Students should be coached on having questions prepared for their interviewers. If they want to ask the same question to different interviewers, they should be transparent by stating something like, “I asked this earlier to Dr. X but I am interested in your viewpoint,” since the interviewers may compare notes later. Students should have a prepared list of possible questions to ask if they are prompted to do so. See Boxes 2 and 3 for sample questions for faculty interviewers and residents at programs.

### Box 2
**Sample questions for faculty interviewers:**

- What are recent graduates doing?
- How many residents have been accepted to fellowship?
- Do all members of the faculty participate in teaching?
- What is the role of fellows in the department?
- Do you anticipate major changes in the department in the next five years?
- Is faculty turnover expected? Will this impact residency training?
- What is the resident role in “private” patient care?
- How well is the department supported by the university?
- How have previous residents performed on CREOG exams?
- How many didactic sessions are there in a week? Is there protected time for these?
- Is there a research requirement? What type of support is available for research projects?
- Is there camaraderie among residents?
- Strengths and weaknesses of the program?
- What is the delivery experience? Surgical experience?
- Are there rotations at outlying sites or hospitals?
- Have any residents left the program recently? What is the explanation for their departure?
- When was your last RRC (Residency Review Committee) site visit? Were there any citations, and when is your next site visit? (The maximum time for a great program is 5 years and any interval less than 4 years should raise flags.)
- Are there any surgical or obstetrical procedures that have low numbers of exposure compared to nationwide averages and, if so, what steps are being taken to improve exposure?
Box 3
Sample questions for residents:

- Are you happy with your residency training?
- What is the call structure and schedule?
- Is there an educational stipend?
- Is there a parental leave policy?
- How do faculty interact with residents? (This is a nice open-ended question that can address morale, respect and out of hospital activities and camaraderie.)

After the Interview

Many students question if they should send follow-up communication to a program. In general, if a program states that they do not want to receive communication the applicant should honor this request. However, if this is not stated, applicants should send brief, personal emails to the program director and, if possible, to their interviewers, stating specific reasons that they like the program. Applicants should not send the same email or thank you note to every interviewer. For example, if you interviewed with 12 faculty, but you really connected with 2-3, it is better send 2-3 personal, thoughtful emails to those faculty, rather than generic responses to all 12 interviewers.

It is important to encourage students to keep track of thoughts regarding pros and cons of each program after they interview. This will facilitate an easier rank list development at the end of interview season. Students should be aware of the Match Prism app that is available as a resource to help rate programs after an interview: https://apps.apple.com/us/app/the-match-prism/id687444845

Related Questions and Answers

Q: How many interviews are appropriate?
A: Approximately twelve interviews is considered the “sweet spot.” In recent years for ob-gyn, approximately 90% of applicants ranking 10 or more programs matched, and more than 99% of applicants ranking 20 or more programs were successful. Only 70% of applicants ranking five programs matched (NRMP 2018).

Q: What about couples match and interviews?
A: Couples matching is different. Each student is able to rank up to 20 programs including a “no match” option. The pair will match to the most preferred pair of programs on the rank order lists where each partner has been offered a position. An honest appraisal of the qualities of each applicant in the pair is essential to ensuring the best match for both students. An appreciation of the competitiveness of the respective fields is also necessary, as choosing highly competitive programs may limit the success of a couples match.

Q: Which programs should students be encouraged to select for an interview?
A: Ideally a student should select a range of programs, including highly competitive, middle range, and less competitive programs. Students in the lower third of their class or with less competitive applications should have more programs in the middle to less competitive range.

Q: What should I do if my student is not receiving many interview offers?
A: The FA should be in contact with their advisees to be sure that they are receiving an appropriate number of interview offers. If there are concerns about the number of interview offers, there are several options to attempt to increase offers. First, the FA can encourage the student to apply to additional programs. In addition, the FA can encourage the student to reach out personally to program directors and program managers with targeted reasons that they are interested in their particular program. The FA may find it helpful to reach out to programs to advocate for their students, perhaps asking for a holistic review of the application if appropriate. Finally, if students keep track of interview dates of local programs, they can reach out a day prior to or the day of interviews and see if there are any cancellations that they can fill.

Q: How should students be coached to handle “Taboo Topics?”
A: The NRMP has a list of several questions/topics which are considered to be illegal or coercive.
These include asking questions about age, gender, religion, sexual orientations, family status, other programs applying to and ranking of the current program by the applicant. Unfortunately, these questions are sometimes asked often inadvertently and without ill intention. The applicant is recommended to practice a planned response to these questions, such as, “I politely decline to answer this question during my interview today, thank you.” Applicants are also allowed to answer these questions if they are comfortable with the question and their response.

**Conclusion**

The interview is possibly the most important component of a student applicant’s successful residency match. The FA can be highly influential in this part of the application process by preparing the student before, during and after the interview.
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