

A Proposal to Reform the Residency Interview Process: An Applicant's Perspective

Melcher and colleagues' 2-step preinterview match algorithm, described in a recent issue of the *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*, could be successfully applied to the Main Residency Match.¹ Applications for residency training have increased by an average of 14.5 applications per applicant from 2014 to 2018.² This increase has resulted in programs receiving hundreds, if not thousands, of applications per application cycle, which has heightened the competition for residency interviews. Although applying to as many programs as possible may seem like the right strategy for medical graduates and their advisors, it reduces the percentage of total applicants with a sufficient number of interviews to match. For example, if the top 5% of highly qualified applicants applied to every residency program in the country for a given specialty, they could conceivably hold hostage the vast majority of interview spots. This results in a large group of highly qualified applicants being denied the requisite number of interviews needed to match and subsequently increases the likelihood of match failures.

In addition, the invitation-to-interview process incentivizes applicants to schedule all invitations regardless of ability or desire to attend, as invitations are e-mailed at sporadic times and scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis. Applicants are not provided any information in this process to help them predict the total number of invitations they will receive during the interview season. Thus, applicants are encouraged to schedule every invitation they receive whether they intend to interview or not, for fear of not getting enough opportunities to interview. The lack of transparency and complexity hinders residency applicants' rational decision-making.

Excessive applications are also problematic for residency programs and their directors because they have significantly less time and resources to devote to reviewing applications. Instead, to choose their residents, programs increasingly rely on standardized examination scores, honor society status, and other variables that are easily sortable, but have not been

consistently shown to be good predictors of resident performance.^{3,4} Additionally, the decrease in time and resources adversely affects a program's ability to adequately assess the commitment an applicant might have to their program, an uncertainty which, paradoxically, encourages programs to interview more than the number of applicants necessary to fill their complement, further escalating costs and exacerbating their chances of success at finding committed postgraduate trainees.

Finally, the rise in applications has increased financial costs for applicants and institutions. Medical students, already in debt due to tuition costs, often require additional loans to pay for potentially excessive airfare and hotels.⁵ Program directors must impose on medical faculty time spent teaching or fulfilling clinical obligations to read applications and conduct interviews, often outside work hours.

If applied to the Main Residency Match, the advantages of Melcher and colleagues' preinterview match algorithm are as follows:

1. Applicants and programs enter the interview with full knowledge of each other's intent to interview. Programs will have more confidence that applicants coming to interview are committed, and applicants will not be obligated to correspond with programs solely to express their desire to interview.
2. The interview invitation timeline is non-random, standardized, and brief. Applicants do not stress over first-come, first-served invitations nor do programs have the ability to over-invite applicants.
3. Equity and efficiency are increased in the residency interview invitation process. Restricting the total number of interview invitations applicants receive and schedule may help to maximize the total number of applicants who receive a sufficient number of interviews to secure a postgraduate position. Furthermore, a limit on the total number of interviews completed may reduce the cost of travel and applicant absenteeism during their last year of medical school.

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