

SIGN OF THE TIMES: PART II

Residency Recruitment: A New Program Director's Perspective

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On Match Day 2014, 25,687 applicants matched to first-year residency positions. With more than 40,000 registrants, this represented an overall 75% match rate to first-year positions. According to National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) data, in internal medicine 6,524 positions were offered, and 6,456 were filled.

The recruitment process can be a grueling one for both applicants and program directors. Beginning in late fall and continuing into the cold winter months, with long interview days and more applicants than positions, the process can be particularly challenging for new program directors. Armand Krikorian, MD, was faced with such a challenge in fall 2013. An endocrinologist by training, Dr. Krikorian had served as the associate program director at Case Western Reserve University's internal medicine residency program for more than three years. He moved to Chicago in December 2012 to take a new position as internal medicine residency program director for the University of Illinois-Chicago (UIC)-sponsored program at Advocate Christ Medical Center, a tertiary care hospital in the southern suburbs of Chicago. The 2013-2014 recruitment season was the first one he oversaw in its entirety.

For an intern class size of 26, the program received 3,719 applications for the 2014 Match year. Previous applicant survey data reveal that, across specialties, US seniors apply on average to about 30 programs, with some applying to more than 100. Their top preferences in selecting programs include geographic location, reputation of the program, quality of education and training, and quality of the residents. According to the 2014 NRMP Survey results, program directors

have common preferences for screening candidates: USMLE Step 1 and Step 2 CK scores, passing USMLE Step 2 CS, MSPEs, letters of recommendation, and class rankings. Program directors often use ERAS-based filters to narrow down the applicant pool to a manageable number, with the unintended consequence of "filtering out" potentially worthy applicants who do not meet some or all of the set criteria. As a case in point, Dr. Krikorian's program invited less than 10% of applicants for interviews (350/3,719). In determining how many applicants to invite for interviews, programs usually refer to their own historical Match data, estimating how many applicants they had to rank to obtain one match.

The recruitment process in place when Dr. Krikorian started at UIC/Advocate Christ was already solid and efficient. He worked closely with the associate program director chairing the selection committee and focused on organizing the interview day as efficiently as possible in order to minimize downtime and keep the applicants engaged. Their interview day went from 8 am to 1 pm and included a tour of the hospital, morning report, lunch, faculty interviews, and an exit interview.

As the program director, Dr. Krikorian was actively involved in speaking with the applicants. He gave a 30-minute overview in the morning and ensured all the applicants' questions were answered. He interviewed some of the applicants himself and conducted exit interviews with as many applicants as possible. A popular feature during the interview day was the applicants' lunch with residents. This allowed the applicants to interact freely with the current resi-

dents and have their questions answered candidly. The applicants gave overwhelmingly positive feedback about this session, noting that they enjoyed speaking to the residents without the presence of faculty.

In order to continuously improve on their process, programs conduct post-interview surveys. The program at Advocate Christ conducted two post-interview surveys—one in person on the interview day and the second online following the Match. During the exit interview, the applicants were asked questions related to their interview day experience. The post-Match survey was sent to those applicants who were ranked by the program but did not match and asked, confidentially, what factors influenced their decision to choose another program. There was an impressive 50% response rate, providing the program with invaluable data. As program director, Dr. Krikorian had a debrief session with faculty and reviewed survey results with a focus on what the program could and could not change. Overall, the program interviewed more than 300 applicants, ranked less than 200, and had an excellent match.

Some of the lessons learned that could benefit new program directors include:

- Know your competition in the city, and gauge how likely the applicant is to come to your program.
- Take time in establishing your criteria for selection. Once they are set, stick to them!
- Review the ERAS applications thoroughly looking for red flags that could be hiding in the letters of recommendation or the MSPEs.

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