Prepping for your interviews

• **Know your background**
  - **Review any materials you've submitted to the program:** your application/CV, personal statement, and any correspondence
    - clinical experiences at your most recent and relevant rotations
    - academic work
    - research you participated in
    - any other educational, clerkship, work, and other activities that might highlight your skills and experience
  - **List your strengths, values, accomplishments, and abilities**
    - Helps prepare you to answer questions, such as “Why should we want you as a resident in our program?” and “What makes you stand out from other candidates?”
  - **Identify the five key aspects of yourself you want the program to know**

• **Research your chosen specialty**
  - Clue in and remain current regarding the hot topics and trends of your chosen specialty. Interviewers may ask questions about your opinion on major issues facing the specialty, and it helps to have some insight into your future profession.

• **Research each program**
  - Research the Department and faculty members. Try to get a basic sense of the program. Everyone appreciates interviewing someone who has taken the time to research the organization.
  - Read printed materials, visit websites, and talk to any of your contacts and fellow students who might have a connection to the program or supporting institution.

• **Prepare answers to common questions**
  - Why did you choose this specialty?
  - Why did you apply to this program?
  - What are your strengths and weaknesses?
  - What are you looking for in a program?
  - What is an interesting case you participated in? Can you tell me about a patient you cared for who was particularly memorable?
  - What are your career goals?
  - Where do you see yourself in five years? ten years?
  - If you can answer most of the questions on this list effectively, you should be well prepared
  - Answers should be brief, succinct, non-defensive, and factual — never fabricate or overstate information. Respond consistently from question to question and interviewer to interviewer.
  - “**Tell me about yourself**” – Prepare an answer about 1-2 minute in length that is focused on medically- and specialty-related anecdotes as well as lets your personality shine. A helpful outline:
    - First fifteen seconds is a brief review of who you are (My name is ____, I’m originally from ____ , and I’m attending the X Medical School).
    - The next thirty seconds is a review of your educational background, undergraduate degree, work experience, and life experience.
    - The next thirty seconds is a review of special attributes from medical school, such as leadership positions, family medicine experience, or other experiences that led you to the decision for this specialty.
    - Final fifteen seconds is a review of why you’re interested in this residency specifically and what attracted you to this place here and now.

**please see list of frequently asked questions at the back of the packet**
• **Prepare for difficult questions**
  o **Your medical school performance** – First, brainstorm a list of possible questions you may be asked. For example, questions about your medical school performance might involve a disappointing grade, a difficult semester, lukewarm clerkship comments, or failing the USMLE Step 1 exam. Then prepare responses (with the help of your advisor), and rehearse those responses in advance.
    • Especially when answering questions about a challenging time for you, your response should be open and non-defensive and **explain how you overcame the challenge and improved your skills, abilities, and knowledge as a result.**
  o **Unclear or confusing questions** – While in the interview, if you’re unclear about what the interviewer is asking, request they restate the question. Try to determine what information he or she seeks. Feel free to stop and organize your thoughts — nothing’s wrong with pausing briefly before responding.
  o **Inappropriate and illegal questions** – The law prohibits some types of questions, which you’re not obligated to answer. Most illegal questions fit into one of three broad categories:
    • disabilities and physical skills
    • race, ethnicity, or creed
    • family and relationship issues

  *How you handle such questions is a personal decision* – remember these questions generally are more ignorant than malicious. A fine line exists between questions that are illegal and those that are simply inept, curious, or friendly. You are not required to answer.
    • Don’t respond to these questions aggressively. Rather, carefully consider whether you want to answer. Refusing may reduce your opportunity to make a positive impression.
    • A better option may be to smile, remain pleasant, and answer the question, focusing your comments on the seriousness of your commitment to your training. For example, if a female applicant is asked about her family plans, some version of “I’m pleased with the job I’ve done thus far balancing my personal and professional life. There shouldn’t be a problem with it in the future” should suffice.

• **Prepare your own questions**
  o This is your opportunity to show interest in the program as well as to broaden and deepen your knowledge of the program to assess how compatible you are
  o Under no circumstances should you ask about salary, benefits, vacation, and competition
  o Note: Everything you say before, during, and after the interview is on the record. Even when you’re speaking informally with residents, be careful what you ask. You absolutely do not want to be remembered for telling housestaff you’re looking for “the most cushy program possible.”

**please see list of example questions at the back of the packet**

• **Interview Day**
  o Be on time. Interviews are stressful as they involve navigating a foreign city. Be prepared. Consider a hotel that is close to the interview site. A hotel that is within walking distance (possible in many large cities) is advantageous as it eliminates "variables" such as driving a car and parking.
  o Dress professionally.
    • Choose a conservatively colored suit, solid or pinstripes are acceptable, women can wear either a skirt or pants.
    • Choose a conservatively colored shirt; men should wear a button-down shirt, women can wear the same or blouse or light sweater.
    • Wear simple, comfortable dress shoes that you can walk in easily to tour clinics and hospitals.
Men should wear a tie. Choose one that is also conservative and is solid, striped or has a small pattern.

Men should have well groomed facial hair.

Make-up for women should be subtle.

Avoid strong smelling perfumes or cologne.

Keep jewelry tasteful and to a minimum

- Avoid drinking coffee or chewing gum during an interview.
- Always carry pens and copies of your CV. The pen should be professional, not a brightly colored drug rep pen.
- Interviews involve stamina and are exhausting. You may be meeting with multiple faculty members in just one day. Do your best to rest, eat properly, and exercise for the "marathon" that awaits you.
- Interviews are looking for eye contact, a firm handshake, and a generally positive attitude. Avoid slouching in your chair. These skills do not always come naturally, and can be practiced prior.
- Just remember: RELAX AND BE YOURSELF

• After the interview
  - A thank you note should be written to those with whom the student spoke. It is acceptable to send an e-mail note, but handwritten notes are often more impressive.
  - Consider asking interviewers for a business card so you know where to send it
  - If there are additional questions, students should ask them through e-mail. Students often want to do a second visit to certain programs and it is appropriate to ask about second visits after the interview.
  - At the end of the interview day notes should be written about the program. This will help students stay organized and keep from becoming confused about the characteristics of each program visited.

• Cancelling Interviews
  - If you need to cancel an interview, emailing the program coordinator is appropriate when done with advanced notice.
  - Call the program if you're canceling close to the date or to follow up if you receive no email response so that the program can give your interview slot to another applicant.

• Some general DON'TS
  - Don’t openly compare the program you’re interviewing at with other programs in town.
  - Don’t be rude to staff.
  - Don’t spend the day asking for special favors such as asking the program coordinator to run an errand.
  - Don’t obsess over getting parking validation for the interview.
  - Don’t slouch during your interview.
  - Don’t use your cell phone during the interview. Even if you're only taking notes, it looks like you're not paying attention.
  - Don’t ask questions that are easily answered by looking at the program's website.
  - Don’t be ingratiating with faculty or the program director.
  - Don’t engage in public displays of affection if your spouse or partner accompanies you to a social event.
  - Don’t bring infants and small children to the interview since they can disrupt activities.

**Information compiled from the Careers in Medicine website and the MedEd Portal from AAMC**
Frequently Asked Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why did you become a doctor?
3. How would your friends describe you?
4. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
5. Why are you interested in our program?
6. What are you looking for in a program?
7. Why should we choose you?
8. Can you tell me about this deficiency on your record?
9. Why are you interested in this specialty?
10. Tell us about your research experience.
11. If you could not be a physician, what career would you choose?
12. What do you see yourself doing in the future?
13. What leadership roles have you held?
14. What do you do in your spare time?
15. What was your favorite course in medical school?
16. Why did you choose this specialty?
17. What are your goals?
18. Are you interested in academic or in clinical medicine?
19. Do you want to do research?
20. What was the most interesting case that you have been involved in?
21. Do you plan to do a fellowship?
22. What is your most important accomplishment?
23. What motivates you?
24. What will be the toughest aspect of this specialty for you?
25. If you could do medical school over again, what would you change?
26. What do you think you can contribute to this program?
27. Do you see any problems managing a professional and a personal life?
28. Are you prepared for the rigors of residency?
29. How much did lifestyle considerations fit into your choice of specialty?
30. Describe the best/worst attending with whom you have ever worked.
31. What is the greatest sacrifice you have already made to get to where you are?
32. What problems will our specialty face in the next 5-10 years?
33. How would you describe yourself?
34. List three abilities you have that will make you valuable as a resident in this specialty.
35. Describe a particularly satisfying or meaningful experience during your medical training. Why was it meaningful?
36. What is one event you are proudest of in your life?
37. What was the most difficult situation you encountered in medical school?
38. What clinical experiences have you had in this specialty?
39. How well do you take criticism?
40. What questions do you have for me?
What to Ask During the Residency Interview

Education
- Is there an orientation program for incoming residents?
- Is there a formal didactic curriculum, and what is its structure?
- What are the informal learning opportunities (i.e., bedside rounds, etc.)?
- What programs exist for resident education (e.g., lectures, journal clubs, grand rounds, board review courses,)?
- Is there a feedback structure that allows for the resident to evaluate the program's curriculum?
- Is attendance at regional and national conferences encouraged? Is it funded, and, if so, to what degree?
- What are the required rotations for the first year? Subsequent years?
- Are there any required rotations that take place outside of the city?
- Are there opportunities to do “away” rotations?
- Is there a formal mentoring program for new residents, and do faculty serve as mentors?

Research Opportunities
- Are research opportunities provided to residents? Is this a required experience?
- Is there a possibility of "protected" time for research?
- How are fellowships handled?

Teaching Responsibilities
- What teaching responsibilities for medical students are expected of residents?
- If residents have teaching responsibilities, how much time per week is spent with students? Is it "protected"?
- Is there any formal training for residents on how to teach students and other learners effectively, and how to provide feedback?

Clinical Duties
- What is the general call schedule?
- What provisions are made for back-up call or sick-call coverage?
- What type of structure for supervision is in place?
- Do your residents express that there is an appropriate balance between independence and supervision?
- How does the resident’s autonomy change as he/she progresses through the program?
- What type of ancillary support is available (phlebotomy, respiratory therapy, social workers, etc.)?
- Does the general volume of clinical responsibility support a balance between service and education?
- Do your residents express they are involved in too much non-educational activity (i.e., “scut work”)?

Resident Performance
- How often are residents evaluated?
- What is the structure of the evaluation (forms, face-to-face, etc.)?
- What other forms of feedback does the resident receive (in-training exam, etc.)?
- What support structures are in place for residents in academic need?

Program Performance
- What is the status of the program’s accreditation?
- If there were any citations at the last review, what has been done to correct them?
- When is the next Residency Review Committee (RRC) review?
- Are there any plans for changing the program size or structure?
- What is the status of the last Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) Institutional Review?
- How solid is the financial status of the sponsoring institution?
- How committed is your institution to resident education and graduate medical education in general? How is this evidenced?
- What percent of your residents complete your program?
- What percent of your graduates pass the specialty boards on their first attempt?
- Where do your graduates go (e.g., fellowship, academics, private practice)?

**Employment Issues**

- What are the basic resident benefits?
- Is parking a concern for residents at your program?
- Are meals paid for when on call?
- What is your family leave policy?
- Is there reimbursement for educational supplies and books?
- Are moonlighting opportunities available?
- What are the rules for moonlighting?
- How are residents represented at the institution level? How is the resident member of GMEC selected?
- Is there a union? Is membership mandatory? Are there dues?
- Is there a House Officers Association?

**Questions to specifically ask other Residents**

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?
- Would you consider the same program if applying again?
- Is there an appropriate balance between service obligations and the educational program?
- Is there enough ancillary support to minimize "scut?"
- What has changed since you came to the program?
- Is the program responsive to suggestions for change?
- How accessible is the faculty?
- Is the relationship with faculty collegial?
- Do the residents get along with one another?
- How do your residents get along with residents in other programs?
- In what activities are you involved outside of the program?
- How does your spouse/significant other like the city/area?

**Questions to ask Yourself**

Finally, you will likely find yourself facing a decision between one of several programs which are all extremely similar from academic and patient-care standpoints. At this time, it is very important to consider factors relating to your personal happiness and comfort for the duration of your residency.

- Can I be happy working in this program and with these people?
- Am I confident in the program and the sponsoring institution?
- Are there factors that make this place (city/town/rural area) an attractive place for me to live during my residency? (Factors that you may include are proximity to immediate and extended family, happiness of spouse/significant other, housing, cost of living, quality of secondary school system, community opportunities, and recreational activities.)