

A Retrospective Analysis of Contemporary Trends from the NRMP Program Director Surveys : A Call to Action



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Opinion

A Retrospective Analysis of Contemporary Trends from the NRMP Program Director Surveys: A Call to Action. Every year, thousands of medical students around the world embark on the next step of their medical journey as they transition from medical school to residency. While Match Day can be an exciting time of year for many soon-to-graduate medical students, not all applicants share this sentiment as they discover they were left without a training position. In 2012, to help facilitate the matching of candidates who found themselves without a training position, the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) launched the Match Week Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program® (SOAP®)- replacing what was once colloquially known as, the “scramble.” Using SOAP, eligible unmatched candidates may then apply to any remaining unfilled positions using the Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS®). However, every year, still a portion of graduates go unmatched and are left with their future in medicine uncertain.

For decades, the number of applicants has outnumbered the available residency positions, often in excess of ten thousand applicants [1]. With the continuous construction of new medical schools to meet the increasing demands of healthcare throughout the nation, [2] the number of residency applicants has outpaced the number of available residency positions [1].

Established in 1952, the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) is a private, non-profit corporation that provides an unbiased neutral platform for applicants and residency programs alike to match one another using the submitted preferences of both parties [1]. Collecting data from both applicants and program directors, biennially the NRMP publishes a compendium of data regarding the results of the most recent residency match [3]. Among the various published reports, thousands of residency program directors are assessed on the qualities they consider most important when selecting among the thousands of applicants to interview and rank for the

match [3]. However, it is currently difficult to predict how these values have evolved over time. To our knowledge, there exists no formalized composite or graphic of this data combining periods over time on the key factors that guide program directors' decisions when selecting applicants to interview and later rank. With the number of applicants continuing to exceed the number of available positions every year, [1] such knowledge may serve as an adaptive imperative and guide student in preparation for residency-match. By adding the contextual dimension of time to the already existing data, we may now model and forecast the changing values of residency program directors through its predictive value.

In my quest to become a psychiatrist, it has become ever clear to me that there is more to an application than just strong board scores. This deceptive axiom is often adopted by many medical students and others alike. With its recent surge in popularity in the United States, Psychiatry has quickly risen to be one of the most sought-after fields by those applying to residency programs [4]. With psychiatry residency programs experiencing increased numbers of applications, [4] matching into one's desired program has become a more difficult endeavor. To put things into perspective, as of the most recent data in 2018, there were 1.53 applicants for every one psychiatry training position available. Of all specialties, psychiatry is only second to Interventional Radiology in this regard, standing at 1.86 applicants per training position [5]. Competing against daunting numbers of applicants in the field of psychiatry, I am currently in the process of compiling years of NRMP psychiatry program director data for the future use of other psychiatry applicants. However, given the wide applicability of this data, it may yield valuable insight and information for those interested in every specialty alike. Therefore, it is my hope that this op-ed may persuade others in their respective fields to collaborate with me in an attempt to quantify these perceptual shifts for the educational use of all.

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