

WHEN AND WHERE TO DO AN EMERGENCY MEDICINE ROTATION (Adrienne Birnbaum, MD; Wallace Carter, MD)

Choosing an institution

Students may choose to perform a rotation at their home institution, visit another institution, or both. Potential reasons for choosing an "away" rotation include targeting a program or geographic area that the student has potential interest in as a residency training site.

In general, the performance of multiple EM rotations, especially more than two, at different institutions that simply duplicate experiences is probably best discouraged. The fourth year of medical school provides the student with a unique last opportunity to experience various areas of medicine with education as the primary goal. A student might consider supplementing core rotations at the home or other institution with an additional subspecialty elective in an area such as EMS, Toxicology, or Pediatric EM.

Students are encouraged to collect information on available rotations. Rotations may, for example, differ considerably in the level of responsibility for patient care afforded. The true sub-internship experience often allows the student to function, under faculty supervision, at the level of care-giver, while a more observational role is the norm in other institutions. Many programs offer a lecture series specially designed for students as well as conferences provided for EM residents. Experiences unique to certain institutions include a level one trauma experience, EMS experience in ambulance and/or helicopter transport, hyperbaric medicine, toxicology, pediatric EM fellowship program, etc. A good source of information on programs offering student electives in EM can be found by visiting the SAEM web page. The Undergraduate Rotations Directory can be found in the table of contents on the home page. This directory includes a variety of information such as: type of hospital(s); patient volume and variety; EMS opportunities; conference information; requirements of the rotation and unique opportunities afforded by the institution. Details about scheduling and availability are also provided.

While the student may be attracted to an institution because of the presence of a particular feature, such as a helicopter program, hyperbaric medicine, toxicology or pediatric EM, the assumption should not be made that students will automatically be exposed to that particular aspect during the standard student rotation. Specialized interests should be directed to the rotation preceptor in advance to design an individualized rotation that includes the specific request.

Begin planning early

Proper supervision of medical students requires faculty supervision, a resource that is limited. As a result, many institutions have a maximum quota of students that they are willing to accept for each rotation block. Students that are interested in EM residency training should plan to perform the student rotation early in the academic year (by October or latest, November) in order to confirm their interest in EM as a specialty and so that evaluations and letters of recommendation from these rotations will be available in time for residency application. Heavily subscribed student electives may fill their quota of students accepted into the rotation by spring of the academic year preceding the planned elective. To avoid being closed out of such rotations, start investigating options early. A student who has special interest in performing an elective at a particular institution that has filled its quota should speak directly to the preceptor of the rotation to express their specific interest in the program.