

Interviews

When should I plan on scheduling interviews with residency programs? (Louis Binder, MD)

The heaviest interview months for residency interviews in Emergency Medicine are in December and January. Some residencies may extend interview invitations earlier (October or November) to especially well qualified applicants, to students already on site undertaking away electives at that institution, or to applicants well known to the institution (i.e. students from their home school, repeat applicants, or those with clinical or research experience at the site). If you are offered an early interview and it is convenient to accept, go ahead. However, for planning purposes, anticipate that the majority of your interviews will occur in December and January, and plan accordingly for time off, flexible rotations that will allow absences for interviews, and so forth.

If you are planning to undertake a lot of out of town interviews around the country, it is generally a good idea to plan for time off in December and/or January in order to block travel for interviews and to avoid compromise of clerkship experiences and responsibilities. If you are planning fewer interviews that are predominantly close to home, you may be able to work them around your clerkship obligations, particularly if your clerkship at that time can be a flexible one regarding necessary absences and makeups with you for missed experiences.

What is the best time to interview? Author #1: (Peter DeBlieux, MD; Sam Keim, MD; Carey Chisholm, MD) There's no consensus on this issue. Unlike what is advocated in Iserson's book, many of us feel that the last week of interview season is a bad choice...the program directors are tired, you are tired, and spontaneity is lost. There is also no bad weather buffer. There is a "learning curve" over 2 to 3 interviews, so perhaps target your "front runner" programs after you complete several. I particularly enjoy the time in December before the holiday season...and likewise would avoid the week after New Years.

Author #2: Michelle Lin, MD For more information on the best time interview, read the 2000 Academic Emergency Medicine journal article "Does Interview Date Affect Match List Position in the Emergency Medicine National Residency Matching Program Match?" by LM Lee, HW Park, and DT Overton. This retrospective multicenter study during the 1997-98 interview season found that EM applicants were ranked and unranked, independent of when they were interviewed. [Does Interview Date Affect match List Position?](#)

How to accept, decline or postpone invitations to interviews (Peter DeBlieux, MD; Sam Keim, MD; Carey Chisholm, MD)

The early-bird concept with accepting invites: Accept an invitation as soon as you are able to arrange travel plans. Advantage and ease of scheduling goes to the best prepared. Your options will be limited the longer you wait to respond. Some programs offer invitations and hold posts for a limited time only 2-3 weeks, some over a month, others indefinitely. If programs have not heard a response after that time frame, a second wave of invitations is sent out to other applicants. Be courteous to your peers.

If you are having difficulty with scheduling days and times let the program coordinators know that you are working on a way to make it, or that you may need to postpone for the time being. Good communication skills will secure you a spot in the future when you uncover hidden funds. When declining an invitation, first make sure that you have secured enough interviews to suit your needs. To decline appropriately, do so early and be polite. Most program directors are understanding and sensitive to student's time and financial constraints.

Dos and don'ts of the interview trail (Peter DeBlieux, MD; Sam Keim, MD; Carey Chisholm, MD)

Do accept invites to stay with residents in the program if.... You are well informed and comfortable with the situation. For example, if you have shared interests or background with the resident. This can be a hit or miss situation and personalities play a large role. If you decline, ask for the resident to escort you through the hospital, didactic session, or to observe change of shift in the ED. This will increase your exposure to residents and faculty while preventing hurt feelings.

Do accept invites for second looks. Not offered by all programs, you might ask. It is a very positive move to communicate interest in a program and allows a student to meet with different residents and faculty that were not present during the interview day. Again, try to arrange a time with plenty of residents or faculty such as change of shift and didactic experiences. Financially, this can be taxing, but well worth it for your top choices.

Do write thank you notes. A must; consider writing notes to all those that interviewed student or program directors only. It is fair to ask how applicants are selected to help determine how many letters should be sent. Do not write identical thank you notes to all members of the selection committee; we compare notes. Try to mention something particular that we discussed during the interview, but it does not need to be novelistic in length. Try to include the program coordinator among your list of thank you's and do not underestimate their contributions to this process.

Do make follow up contacts. For those programs that you are particularly interested in a brief letter at the conclusion of the interview season is appropriate. It might reaffirm your interest after all interviews and include an update on board scores, rotation grades, or publications.

Don't be a "NO-SHOW"! Most programs have waiting lists, and several people to review your file before you arrive. Please do not waste their time, and likewise be courteous to your peers on the waiting list (and perhaps eliminate a competitor from the applicant pool!). Call ahead as soon as you decide you will not be going to an interview. You won't hurt our feelings. A "same-day" cancellation is almost as bad, unless of course there has been a personal emergency or travel problems.

However, EM is a small community and if you are a no-show at a program there is a good chance that word of this will spread around... and could affect your ranking. Do not underestimate how damaging this can be!

Don't be late or fall asleep during the process

Don't over or under dress

Don't be artificial. Be yourself!

Don't dominate the interview - let the interviewer set the tone and pace.

How should I handle inappropriate questions? (Peter DeBlieux, MD; Sam Keim, MD; Carey Chisholm, MD)

These may be encountered, and your response should be tailored to the situation. We try to find out as much as we can about you as a person, but for some this may feel like prying. If you are uncomfortable answering a question, say so. One technique is to turn the question back on the person, or say something like "I'm curious why that information would be of interest to you?" Also keep in mind who is asking the question. If a faculty member or resident is asking, it usually is out of ignorance of the "rules" or simply genuine curiosity (an extension of our "history taking" skills). Few of these questions represent true malice, although I would have serious concerns if they are coming from a program director or chair.

What should I do if I REALLY like a program? (Peter DeBlieux, MD; Sam Keim, MD; Carey Chisholm, MD)

I strongly recommend a follow-up visit if feasible. Three or four years of your life are on the line, so make certain that those favorable first impressions hold. Get a better idea about the city. I also recommend a follow-up letter at the conclusion of interviews to the 3 or 4 programs that you like the most. Don't tell someone that you are ranking them first unless you really are (again we compare notes). Ask the program two pointed questions; "How would an applicant know if the program was really interested in them?", and "If an applicant is very interested in your program how should they communicate this?". The answers are variable and ranges widely from program to program. The only "illegal" activity would be for a program to promise you a position, or to request that you drop out of the match and they will guarantee you a position.