SKIN

SHORT COMMUNICATION

Preference Signaling in the Dermatology Residency Match

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The residency match, facilitated by the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) organization, which utilizes the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS), facilitates the determination of where senior medical students will continue their education as resident physicians.[1] Created in 1952, the match is the culmination of a reciprocal interest between students and residency programs, whereby both entities rank prospects in order of interest. [1] As certain specialties have become inundated with interested applicants, alternative or adjunct methods for increasing match success have been implemented. [1] In the 2020-2021 cycle, Otolaryngology initiated preference signaling (PS), in which students send a signal to a set number of residency programs to indicate a high level of interest in matching to that particular program.[2,3] The purpose of initiating PS into medical residency match is to clarify a student's intentions prior to the release of interview invitations. [2,3] Participation in PS is optional, and students who choose to participate in PS are still encouraged to submit as many applications as they wish, while only schools receiving a signal are notified of the student's action. [4]

This notion has similarly been adopted by other specialties, including general surgery, internal medicine, and dermatology as part of the supplemental ERAS application.[4] In August of 2021, the Association of Professors of Dermatology announced participation in preference signaling in the 2021-2022 application cycle.[5] Within dermatology, each student is allotted three preference signals to distribute to various schools, which are not ranked in any particular order of interest.[4] Importantly, students are directed to not send a PS to programs at which they have done in-person rotations, including their home institution. [4] In an assessment of the 2022 supplemental application, the AAMC published key findings which give insight into the state of residency application.[6] Within dermatology, 117 out of 135 U.S. programs and 93% of applicants chose to participate in the supplemental application.[6] Applicants chose to send signals based on various reasons, the most important factors being geographic location, quality of training, and program correspondence with career goals.[6]

It is important to evaluate the success of PS within each specialty, including dermatology, as well as areas for future improvement. As reported by the AAMC key findings, one-fourth of dermatology programs received up to 53% of preference signals from all applicants, indicating a skewed distribution of signals across programs.[6] This may be due to

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individual program factors, with more competitive residencies receiving more signals as a prerequisite for applicant consideration, or applicants sending signals to programs in which they are somewhat interested to increase chances of consideration.[2] However, it is clear that PS played a major role in interview determination, with programs reporting PS usefulness in identifying unlikely candidates and determination of interview invitations.[6] More studies are needed to determine the role preference signaling plays in the dermatology match itself, and in particular, the impact on final resident class determination.

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