

Introduction

- Evolving match process has resulted in escalating burdens on medical students, residency programs, and medical schools
- Pressure National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) reform
- Large amounts of data regarding strategic ways to apply to residencies, but students are not willing to risk their future based on data alone
- In order to better understand student beliefs, motivations, and experiences of the NRMP, qualitative studies are needed

Research Questions

- How do MS4s feel about the NRMP process?
- How would they suggest changing the NRMP?
- What advice do they have for future students?

Method

- Ten video-recorded focus groups conducted with students who participated in the 2017 and 2018 NRMP ($N = 53$)
- Recordings independently analyzed for thematic categories by two researchers, then reviewed by members of the research team
 - 4th year medical students
 - Residents
 - Graduate medical education faculty
 - Advisory faculty
 - Academic and student affairs faculty

Results

- Five focus groups with 24 MS4s in 2017, and five groups with 29 MS4s in 2018

Table 1. Participants

	Male N (%)	Female N (%)
Primary Care ¹	7 (13.2%)	18 (34.0%)
Non-Primary Care ²	14 (26.4%)	14 (26.4%)
Total	53	

1. Primary Care: students matched in Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics, and Medicine/Pediatrics

2. Non-primary care: students matched in Anesthesiology, Emergency Medicine, Obstetrics/Gynecology, Orthopedic Surgery, Pathology, Plastic Surgery, Psychiatry, Radiology, Rehabilitation Medicine, and Surgery.

Table 2. Thematic Categories

Major Overall Categories

The match is extremely important
The match is expensive and inefficient
The match is stressful and challenging
Applicants have a personal responsibility to succeed

Selecting Programs for Application

The match had complex paperwork & technical issues
Received non-specific information from programs
Lack of specific advice for individual needs
Applicants sought diverse sources of advice
Competing with other students

Accepting and Scheduling Interviews

Waiting is overwhelming and challenging
Students are hyper-vigilant about invitations
Students accept all offers and cancel later if necessary
Students schedule strategically for peak performance
There is a lot of uncertainty during the process

Influences on the Interview Experience

Assistance in arranging visit
Transparency about process
Organization/preparation of interview day
Perceived interest in applicant
Used time outside interview to get to know applicants
Meeting a wide range of residents and faculty
Perceived engagement and caring at the program
Innovative interviewing strategies
Uncertainty about post-interview communication

Discussion

- Understanding student perspective is essential in any attempt to improve the match process
- Students recommend utilizing current residents for the best advice and information
 - Online groups with other applicants are also heavily utilized
- Data from 2018 is showing similar categories

Limitations

- Single institution with those who matched
- Perspectives could have been influenced by the generally positive outcomes, as well as recall bias
- This may have impact on the focus group discussions and the freedom of students to express contrary views

Conclusion

- The match is a high-stakes experience in which the “over-apply, over-accept” strategy is dominant
- Students recognize that they are investing excessive time and resources, but they will not leave anything to chance
- This study illuminates the areas of concern for students and perspectives on best practices

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