

American Academy of Neurology
Statement on 2021–2022 Residency/Fellowship Application Cycle
July 28, 2021

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift to a virtual interview format for the 2020–2021 residency/fellowship application cycle. Although very different from prior interview seasons, both applicants and program leadership reported positive experiences during the 2020–2021 virtual interview season. Virtual interviews provided a significant cost savings for applicants, minimized time away from their clinical and research activities, and reduced the impact to applicants' families.

The data from the 2020–2021 virtual interview season confirm MATCH success rates for candidates were comparable to that of years preceding the pandemic. The overall position fill rate for the 2021 Match was 94.9 percent. At the conclusion of Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program (SOAP), the fill rate was 99.6 percent¹. The National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) summarized the 2021 Applicant and Program Director Survey Findings in a Research Brief which states, "... initial data reports released by the NRMP revealed the 2021 Main Residency Match to be highly successful and that the pivot to a virtual recruitment season did not constrain the abilities of applicants and programs to obtain more PGY-1 placements."²

AAN CONSENSUS STATEMENT REGARDING VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS

The COVID-19 pandemic continues even now, with recent increases in cases in some parts of the country resulting in barriers to travel for many candidates. In consideration of the ongoing pandemic and the lessons learned from the 2020–2021 virtual interview season, the American Academy of Neurology advises that all Neurology and Child Neurology residency/fellowship programs should commit to virtual interviews for all applicants in place of in-person interviews for the 2021–2022 application cycle.

This recommendation reflects a consensus after consultation with members of the AAN's Education Committee, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Anti-Racism, and Social Justice Subcommittee, Graduate Education Subcommittee, Undergraduate Education Subcommittee, Consortium of Neurology Program Directors, and Consortium of Neurology Clerkship Directors.

The goals of this recommendation are to:

1. Maximize safety for applicants and programs
2. Maintain an equitable interview process for all candidates.

ADDITIONAL ADVICE FOR PROGRAMS

1. Application Review
 - a. Complete/maintain a holistic review of applications recognizing that access to different clinical, research, extracurricular, work, and other experiences vary in normal circumstances and are further impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
 - b. Actively work to recruit applicants from diverse backgrounds, including traditionally underrepresented groups, to enhance the diversity among neurology trainees to better represent and meet the needs of the populations we serve. (<https://www.aamc.org/what-we-do/equity-diversity-inclusion/underrepresented-in-medicine>)
 - c. Recognize that some applicants will have completed their clerkship training in a non-traditional environment during the pandemic—some with virtual learning experiences and online educational programming. Some clerkships may have transitioned to pass/fail grading in this setting.
 - d. Maintain flexibility with requirement of neurology-specific letters of recommendation for screening, acknowledging that applicants may not have had access to neurology rotations prior to applying.
 - e. Do not require that a sub-internship (acting internship) be completed by the time of the initial application review.
 - f. Due to limited testing site availability because of COVID -19, be aware that Step 2CK may not be completed at the time of application review and Step 2CS has been discontinued.
2. Away Rotations
 - a. Away rotations should not be mandatory.
 - b. Away rotations should be limited to students who are not offered similar/comparable experiences at their home institution.
 - c. Consider offering virtual experiences, such as virtual visiting clerkships and other online educational opportunities.
3. Second Looks
 - a. Although we strongly recommend that the 2021–2022 application season adhere to a virtual interview structure for all programs, we are aware that some programs and applicants feel that a subsequent in-person visit (second look) to the institution and surrounding area is crucial for applicant rank decisions. If a program does decide to allow in-person visits, these should be for the benefit of the applicant only and designed in a way as to avoid impacting the programs' ranking of the applicants (with obvious exceptions—unprofessional behavior by the applicant, for example).
 - b. Be aware that second look visits financially impact applicants and increase administrative burden to programs.
 - i. "Program directors shall respect the logistical and financial burden many applicants face in pursuing multiple interactions with programs and shall not require them or imply that second interviews or visits are used in determining applicant placement on a rank order list."³
 - c. Programs deciding to allow second look visits should offer equally valuable virtual experiences for applicants who are not able to or prefer not to travel for in-person visits.
4. Post-interview Communication
 - a. All communication must abide by NRMP requirements. The NRMP statement on post-interview communication emphasizes that "program directors shall not solicit or require post-interview communication from applicants, nor shall program directors engage in post-interview

communication that is disingenuous for the purpose of influencing applicants' ranking preferences."³

- b. Applicants should be made aware during the interview that post-interview communication is not expected from applicants.

5. Additional Recommendations Regarding Recruitment/Interviews

- a. If offering a virtual open house before interviews begin, attendance must be optional and should not be used as an indication of an applicant's interest.
- b. Allow a minimum of 48 hours for an applicant to respond to an interview invitation before releasing the spot to another applicant.
- c. Consider involving current residents/fellows in interview process for the benefit of the applicants.
- d. Be mindful of time zone differences when scheduling interviews.
- e. Do not give gifts to applicants. Gifts can introduce bias and increased cost and administrative burden to programs.
- f. Do not record interviews.

ADVICE FOR APPLICANTS

1. Number of Applications: The number of programs to which an applicant applies is an important decision. Applicants feel pressure to apply to enough programs to maximize their chances of matching. However, a large number of applications have the potential to overwhelm programs making it difficult to review each application holistically.
 - a. We encourage applicants to rely on the guidance of medical school advisors and mentors when deciding how many applications to submit. Data from the NRMP (*2020 Charting the Outcomes*) can help students and their advisors assess each applicant's likelihood of matching.
<https://www.nrmp.org/main-residency-match-data/>
 - b. The AAMC "Apply Smart" site offers useful data regarding residency application for applicants.
<https://students-residents.aamc.org/apply-smart-residency>
 - c. The NRMP provides data based on 2018–2020 applicants in their document *Charting Outcomes in the Match*
 - i. The mean number of programs ranked by candidates who matched in Neurology was 12.8 for MD Seniors, 11.1 for DO Seniors, 7.6 for US International Medical Graduates (IMGs), and 6.6 for Non-US IMGs.⁴
 - ii. In the 2020 Match, no Neurology applicant went unmatched if the minimum number of ranked programs on their rank list was 13 programs for MD Seniors, 16 programs for DO Seniors, 16 programs for both US and Non-US IMGs. Similarly, no Child Neurology applicant went unmatched if the minimum number of ranked programs on their list was 14 for MD Seniors, 12 for DO Seniors, and ~ 16 for both US and Non-US IMGs.⁴
 - d. The AAMC and the NRMP data provide data re: previous application cycles. The authors of this statement offer one possible analysis of these data (using MD and DO applicants to Adult Neurology programs to illustrate):
 - i. According to the document from the NRMP titled "Impact of Length of Rank Order List on Match Results: 2002 – 2019 Main Residency Match, all applicants applying to all specialties had a very high likelihood of matching with a rank order list of 10 schools.⁶
 - ii. Calculating a percentage based on the number of applications submitted and the average length of rank list published by the AAMC, an average of 44 percent of programs to which applications were submitted by MD applicants end up on the rank list. For DO applicants

to Neurology, an average of 33 percent of programs to which applications were submitted end up on the rank list.¹

- iii. If there is a high likelihood of matching with 10 programs on the rank list and an average of only 44% of programs are ranked, an MD applicant (Adult Neurology) need not apply to more than 23 programs (10/.44). Similarly, using the same number of 10 programs for a high likelihood of matching with 33% of programs ranked, a DO applicant (Adult Neurology) need not apply to more than 30 programs (10/.33).
- iv. We recognize the limitations of these data in that they are based on averages and should not be used as definitive recommendations for every applicant.
- v. We also recognize that these data do not adequately address the experience of IMGs.
- e. Discussions should be conducted with each student considering reported data in the *Charting Outcomes in the Match* report and using the *Interactive Charting Outcomes Tables*⁵ to explore the consequences of various applicant characteristics on the likelihood of matching and, therefore, on the individual need for number of programs applied to and ranked.
- f. Because each applicant's situation is unique, the number of programs applied to and ranked will vary on a case-by-case basis, with no guarantee of matching.

2. Pre-interview Preparation

- a. Arrange for a secure internet connection for your interview. For current medical students, your student affairs office should be able to help if needed.
- b. We recommend reviewing information available online about programs before your interview. Programs are making every effort to update their websites in anticipation of the interview season.
- c. Programs are encouraged to allow at least 48 hours after issuing an interview invitation for an applicant to accept or decline the offer. Please respond to the interview invitation as soon as you are able. This allows another applicant an opportunity for an interview if you decide to decline the invitation.
- d. Please provide as much advanced notice as possible when cancelling an interview.

3. The Interview Day

- a. Please be present in the virtual space on time for the start of the interview day.
- b. Be yourself and have fun! The interview is an opportunity for program leadership, faculty, and residents to get to know you and vice versa.
- c. Come prepared with a few questions about the program based on your research before the interview.
- d. Do not record interviews.

4. Post-interview Communication

- a. As is stated in the recommendations for programs above, the NRMP advises that "program directors shall not solicit or require post-interview communication from applicants, nor shall program directors engage in post-interview communication that is disingenuous for the purpose of influencing applicants' ranking preferences."³
- b. Applicants are not expected to engage in post-interview communication but may contact programs with specific questions.

AUTHORS

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- Undergraduate Education Subcommittee
- Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Anti-Racism, and Social Justice Subcommittee
- Consortium of Neurology Program Directors
- Consortium of Neurology Clerkship Directors

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