

The Interview

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The interview itself comprises just a small percentage of the time you will devote to getting a residency position, but it has, perhaps, the greatest impact in getting you into any program - more than your file, and more than whatever good words anyone has put in for you. As such, it behooves you to try your very best to make the interview day a successful day in terms of showing your interviewers how good a candidate you are, how it would be a mistake to not rank you high, or better yet, not to prematch you.

Practice, Practice, Practice:

One of the best things you can do is prepare a list of questions that you think will be asked of you. There are many books that provide you with such a list, and it would be good to borrow or buy one of them. I would suggest Iserson's "**Getting Into a Residency.**" In any case, once you have a list of questions prepared, go through them in your mind and imagine how you will answer each question. It does not matter whether you write the answers down or not; rather, it matters that in your mind you are able to answer each question with confidence and eloquence.

When you have the answers etched in your mind, have somebody ask you the questions, but this time answer each question out loud. While you are doing this, make sure that you are conscious of any mannerisms or postures that may belie your inner nervousness when the actual day comes. Body language is important. Make sure the person that you ask to help you practice is someone who can be objective, without being too judgmental (perhaps your girlfriend or boyfriend may not be a good idea).

You can even carry this session further by actually dressing up the way you will be dressing up for the interview day. While for some this might be overkill, it is definitely better for you to be squirming in a too-tight coat during the practice session, rather than when you are in front of the actual interviewers.

At the very least, your list of questions must include these (or similar questions):

1. Describe yourself.
2. Why did you decide to enter this specialty? How did you decide?
3. Why should we pick you and not some other candidate?
4. What are your goals in life?
5. Why did you apply to this program?
6. What are your strengths and your weaknesses?
7. Tell me about an interesting case that you've handled.
8. What do you do in your spare time?
9. Why does your resume say...? (So make sure you have checked your resume and covered any possible questions they may form from reading it.)
10. How do you handle stress/controversy/disputes?

11. How do you see yourself ten years from now?
12. Explain your (low grades, deficiencies, leave of absence, etc...).
13. Tell me about an error of clinical judgment you have made.
14. Tell me a joke.
15. Tell me about your research (i.e., in medical school, or before or after)

The importance of practicing in front of someone else, aside from knowing your answers and answering well, is to be able to detect any non-verbal signals that may become detrimental to your interview. Some of these are:

1. A weak, flimsy handshake (very important; Americans read a firm handshake as a sign of confidence)
2. Constant blinking or looking somewhere else
3. Signs of boredom (you know what these are)
4. Nervous mannerisms
5. Frowning instead of smiling
6. An overly-relaxed posture (leaning back, one arm around the back of the chair, one leg extended)
7. Excessive fidgeting or grooming movements

The list goes on, and you might be surprised at what you and your “coach” find out about your “interview image.”

The “Costume”:

Whether you like it or not, there is an “interview costume.” It’s how we know that it’s “residency interview time;” there are people dressed formally walking around the hospital, when everyone else is in coats or scrubs. Your objective is to fit in. That is just the way things work. Do not try to stand out with loud colors or weird-looking pants. You simply want your interviewers to focus more on what you have to offer, and not at what you are wearing.

The keywords are: conservative, tasteful, and neat.

For the men, here are the simple “rules:”

- Wear a blue, gray, or dull-colored, solid or pinstripe suit, one that is well tailored and that fits well. This may cost a bit of money, but consider it an investment in your future.
- Wear a white or pale-blue solid-color, long-sleeved collared shirt. The sleeves should peek out of your coat arms around an inch, and when you raise your arms above you, the shirt should stay tucked-in.
- Wear a red or navy, solid-colored tie with repeating stripes, polka dots, or insignias.
- Wear black or very dark brown shoes that are shiny and in good condition. Make sure your socks are black or darker than your pants and reach your knees. Many

- candidates come in looking perfect until they sit down and their pants reveal their hairy legs, not fully covered by their short socks.
- Limit jewelry to a watch and a wedding band (if applicable). Make sure your eyeglasses are clean. If you want to keep a pen in your pocket, make sure it is the classy kind, not the one given by a med rep who just visited your medical school.
 - Your hair should be short, and your haircut should not be unusual. No overpowering perfumes and no bubble gum.

For the women:

1. Wear a gray, dark blue or dark maroon suit made of wool or another non-wrinkle suiting material. Skirts are preferred, although with the cold weather during interview season pants are increasingly becoming acceptable. A miniskirt during an interview does not make a good impression.
2. Wear a simply cut cotton, silk, white cream or pastel blouse with a neckline that does not go too low.
3. Wear dark or neutral color simple pumps, closed at the toe and heel, which should not be more than 1 inch in height. You need to be comfortable in your interview shoes, as there is a lot of walking involved during a hospital tour. Nude-colored stockings make you look professional and have the additional function of keeping your legs warm.
4. Wear elegant but simple accessories and jewelry. You want to draw attention to your skills and abilities, and not to your jewelry; you want to leave the impression that you are a professional and not merely a glamour girl. Any overcoat must extend beyond the hem of your skirt, and furs are not advisable.
5. Instead of a purse, carry a leather-zippered case, attaché case or notebook.
6. Easy on the perfume, the make-up, and the nail polish (meaning no ostentatious nail art).

Immediately Before The Big Day:

Before going to the interview, confirm it first with the residency program coordinator. Believe it or not, interviews sometimes get canceled without the interviewees knowing about it. It would be a shame to make all that effort and spend all that money for an interview that has been moved to later date.

Once you have confirmed the interview, research the program like crazy. Find out every bit of information that you can. The most important thing about this is to write all the questions that you can think of while you are doing this. Why? Because the most common question that you will be asked during the interview day by everybody - including the coordinators and the residents - will be, “*Do you have questions you want to ask me?*” And having something to ask is a definite plus because it will appear that you “did your homework” and that you are genuinely interested in their program (let us hope that you actually are).

Some of the questions that should be on your list are:

1. Where do your graduates end up?
2. What is the pass rate for the specialty boards?
3. How is the faculty turnover rate?
4. What will be my non-clinical responsibilities?
5. What are the elective opportunities?
6. What are the research opportunities? Will there be time solely for research?
7. How are the residents evaluated?
8. Is the program fully accredited?
9. Has any resident left?
10. How is the faculty like?
11. Does the program director listen to the residents?
12. How are your didactics held? Do you have “protected time”? (i.e., are the residents exempt from beeper call during didactic sessions)
13. What is the call schedule?
14. Do the residents get to socialize?
15. What is a typical day for a resident?
16. What do you know now as a resident about the program, that you wish you knew when you interviewed?

Do not ask about the salary, benefits, and vacation time.

Plan to arrive a day earlier. Do not schedule interviews one day after the other. Most interviews are held during the winter and during these months, cancellations and changes to travel schedules frequently happen.

The Big Day:

Be on time. Aim to be where you need to be at least 15 minutes before the start of your interview. Some people want to arrive even earlier, to be able to fix themselves up and make sure everything is in order. Because you will probably be in a new place, it might be difficult to predict bad traffic conditions and adjust accordingly.

Look at the day’s schedule. Most programs will provide you with a schedule. This will enable you to prepare yourself mentally. If it is a half-day interview, you should know about it. If you are in for the long haul, you should also know about it, and brace yourself, so that you will not be crawling out of the office of the 10th person to interview you. Furthermore, knowing the schedule allows you to recall what you have read or found out about your next interviewer. Such knowledge allows you to pattern your answers into what this interviewer is interested in, and perhaps enable you to highlight how you too are interested in this particular subject. Also, if there are names among the interviewers that appear hard to pronounce, this will be your chance to ask around about the correct pronunciation.

Smile and be pleasant, regardless of earlier events (traffic, bad weather, canceled flight, redirected baggage, etc.) Avoid relating these events to your interviewers; after all,

the only thing they are really interested in is whether you are going to fit in their program. Some of them may show some actual sympathy, but after that brief moment, it's back to business, as they still have to evaluate you the same way, and come up with conclusions at the end of the day. So smile, be pleasant, and show enthusiasm for the rest of the interview day.

Talk to as many residents as possible. Hopefully, you will get a better perspective of the program through them. Their opinions should help a lot in terms of forming your final decision about the program's rank.

Look confident during the actual interview. A few basic rules:

1. Walk with your chin up, shoulders squared, and with poise.
2. Practice doing a firm, though not a bone-crushing, handshake. If you have a sweaty palm, have a handkerchief in your pocket to dry it before each time that you have to shake somebody's hand.
3. Sit up straight, and lean forward a bit when listening to questions to show interest.
4. Look at your interviewer in the eyes. If this is difficult for you because of your shy nature, look at the bridge of his/her nose. However, it would be best to do this the right way by feeling more confident, losing one's shyness, and looking straight at the eyes of the person to whom you are talking.
5. Acknowledge your interviewers words with actions or brief responses. Even "uhuh" will do. Do not just sit down and wait for the interviewer to stop before being a part of the discourse. However, avoid words for the setting such as "wow," "groovy", "right on," and "cool!"

Eating Out With the Interviewers:

A few basic rules:

1. Do not order alcohol, even if your interviewers do.
2. Do not eat too much.
3. Do not order the most expensive item on the menu.
4. Know your table manners.

Kisses of Death:

There are some things that you simply must not do:

1. Complain about anyone, anything or any other program.
2. Falsify your CV or any of your papers.
3. Use inappropriate humor (read: sexist, racist, off-color jokes).
4. Rambling on and on.
5. Showing gross disrespect through words or actions.

Wrapping Up:

At the end of the day, make sure that you have the numbers or email addresses of everyone you wish to thank. It is difficult to arrange an interview, just as it was difficult for you to prepare for the interview. Thank everyone verbally and by shaking their hands, and make sure that you leave a good last impression. Good luck!

The cheapest kind of board and lodging is the Filipino network. Luck is with you if you know someone in the city, or even better, a resident/fellow or attending in that particular hospital at which you are interviewing. This happens more often than not, as an IMG-friendly hospital with Filipino residents already on staff is more likely to interview more Filipinos for their residency program. However, if there is no one you know in town, your best bet would be to search the internet for a hotel room.

With the advent of the internet, it has been much easier to book hotel rooms, airplane flights, train and bus trips. If your interview trail takes you all around the Northeast US and to some extent the Midwest, the Amtrak US Rail pass might be a good idea. It is a flat fee Amtrak charges for an all-you-can-travel fare, typically 15 or 30 days. Granted, trains are slower than planes, but this fare may take you up and down the East Coast cheaper than multiple plane trips. Take note also that some airplane fares are cheaper than train fares, so weigh your travel options carefully. If you are the adventurous type, rent a car and drive to all your interviews in the area; however this might not be advisable as the cost of car rental and insurance can be prohibitive.