

Radiology Resident Recruitment:

A Study of the Impact of Web-based Information and Interview Day Activities

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Rationale and Objectives: Residency recruitment is a critical and expensive process. A program's Web site may improve recruitment, but little is known about how applicants use program sites or what constitutes optimal content. The importance of an interview day and interactions with a program's residents has been described, but candidate preferences for various activities and schedules have not been widely reported. We investigated contemporary use and perceived utility of information provided on radiology program Web sites, as well as preferences for the interview day experience.

Materials and Methods: Using an anonymous cross-sectional survey, we studied 111 candidates who were interviewed between November 1, 2012 and January 19, 2013 for a diagnostic radiology residency position at our institution. Participation in this institutional review board-approved study was entirely voluntary, and no identifying information was collected. Responses were sealed and not analyzed until after the match.

Results: A total of 70 candidates returned a completed survey (63% response rate). Optimal content considered necessary for a "complete" Web site was identified. The most important factor in deciding where to apply was geographical connection to a program. "Aunt-Minnie" was the most popular source of program information on social media. Candidates overwhelmingly preferred one-on-one faculty interviews but had no preference between a Saturday and weekday schedule. The ideal interview experience should include a "meet and greet" with residents off campus and a personal interview with the program director. The overall "feel" or "personality" of the program was critical to a candidate's rank order decision.

Conclusions: Our findings offer insight into what factors make programs appealing to radiology applicants. This information will be useful to medical educators engaged in career counseling and recruitment.

Key Words: Radiology residency; Internet; graduate medical education; recruitment.

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Residency recruitment is a critical and expensive process during which applicants compete for residency positions and programs compete for the strongest candidates in the National Residency Matching Program (NRMP). An online presence is known to be an important source of program information for applicants (1–6), and a program's Web site may be the first impression a potential applicant has of a residency when deciding where to apply. Information essential for an accurate description of a structure and goals of the radiology program has not been described since brochures were the primary recruitment tool (7). More recent studies suggest that an easily navigated complete Web site may improve recruitment, (2–5,8–10) but little is known about how applicants use program sites or what constitutes optimal content (4,11).

In competitive fields like radiology, program directors receive hundreds of applications from which they are expected to identify candidates most likely to match with their program (12,13). A large amount of subjective and objective information related to academic performance is transmitted to the program from the Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS), but few correlations between performance in medical school and during residency have been established (12). As the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) step 1 score is the only objective comparative benchmark across the entire applicant pool, most program directors consider it very important for screening applicants (12–14). The one factor that is well known to be important to both programs and applicants is geographical connection (1,2,12,13,15–18).

Once applicants are screened and invited to interview, residency programs invest significant time and money in providing a comprehensive interview experience. Interview day is a program's chance to assess the candidates and the candidate's most important source of information about the program (1,3,16,19). Candidates who interview with many training programs face an increasingly difficult task of evaluating different programs to decide where they hope to spend the next 5 years of their lives. The interview experience is a crucial factor in the rank order decisions made by both candidates and programs (16,18–20).

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Interview formats vary widely among programs (14,20) and a range of activities may be scheduled. While the importance of an interview day and interactions with a radiology program's residents have been described, (1,18,21,22) candidate preferences for various activities and schedules have not been widely reported (23,24). One study of radiology candidates found they preferred to interview in a group of two to four peers who met with at least three residents and three faculty, with <10 minutes between interviews, and to go on tours led by residents (19).

Because recruitment is a critical and expensive process for residency programs and candidates, we investigated contemporary use and perceived utility of information provided on radiology program sites, as well as preferences for the interview day experience, to gain insight into what factors make programs appealing to radiology applicants.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Prior to interview season, we reviewed the literature and identified published research in this area. We updated a cross-sectional survey instrument developed previously by our program and added questions to assess contemporary usage and interview preferences. The original survey was administered to 41 candidates invited to interview at University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) for the 2005 match. E-mail invitations to respond to the survey were extended between the rank order deadline and match day. Responses were received from 27 candidates (66% response; Angtuaco M and Deloney LA (2005) unpublished raw data).

The population for our present study was 111 candidates who interviewed for the diagnostic radiology residency at the UAMS between November 11, 2012 and January 19, 2013. The candidates were selected from a pool of 355 ERAS applicants for seven categorical positions offered in the 2013 match. The study was approved by the UAMS Institutional Review Board.

Inclusion criteria for the study were 1) applicants from our medical school, 2) visiting medical students who had completed a senior elective in our department with positive course evaluations and letters of recommendation, 3) applicants from Southeastern states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia) who had USMLE step 1 scores >220 and positive letters of recommendation, and 4) international medical graduates (IMG) with USMLE step 1 scores >230 and letters of recommendation from radiologists in the United States.

During the welcome session on interview day, all candidates were given a paper survey to be completed anonymously during their free time and deposited in a sealed collection box. Oral instructions from the program director described the purpose of the study and assured the candidates that the collection box would not be opened until after the match results were known. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no identifying information was collected.

RESULTS

A total of 70 candidates returned a completed survey (63% response rate). Data were entered into a spreadsheet, and responses were tabulated using descriptive statistics.

Demographics

To guarantee the anonymity of the survey, demographic information was not collected from the candidates completing surveys. However, the population who interviewed for residency and was eligible to be surveyed ($n = 111$) was 76% male and 98% Generation Y/Millennial born in the 1980s. Average USMLE step 1 and step 2 scores for the population were 230 and 237. Using aggregate ERAS data, we know that 7% of the candidates were from our medical school, 54% from border states, 19% from other US states, and 20% from abroad. Of the US students, 59% attended schools in counties in metro areas of one million people or more, 26% in metro areas of 250,000 to <1 million, 10% in metro areas of <250,000, and 2% in urban nonmetro areas (26). In comparison, the 2010 US population had 55% in metro areas of one million people or more, 21% in metro areas of 250,000 to <1 million, 9% in metro areas of <250,000, 13% in urban nonmetro areas, and 2% in rural areas (25).

Web Site Usage

Respondents were very comfortable browsing the Internet (100%) and most frequently access the Internet from a home computer (63%) and/or iPad/iPhone/other mobile device (43%). The majority found residency program Web sites to be most useful when deciding where to apply (59%). Some found them useful when preparing for interviews (44%), but only a few used them to decide where to interview (16%). When asked how easy it was to find information they wanted on radiology residency program Web sites in general, half (51%) said "somewhat easy" and one-third (34%) said "very easy."

Responses regarding use and utility of our program's Web site are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Most candidates (73%) used our Web site for information about the program itself and well over half (63%) found the content to be extremely useful. A second area the candidates found useful was information about the match process. While 66% used the guidance, only 46% found the content itself to be useful, stressing the need for a well-developed content.

Where to Apply

We asked respondents to rank five items by importance in determining where to apply. Proportions of residents choosing each criterion as the first were compared using a chi-squared test. In deciding where to apply, geographical location was ranked first by more residents (42%) than advice from mentor or counselor (26%), advice from other medical

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