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IMPORTANCE OF THE EMERGENCY MEDICINE APPLICATION COMPONENTS: THE MEDICAL STUDENT PERCEPTION

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Abstract—Background: The National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) application has several elements. With limited time and resources, students must prioritize the key application elements on which to focus. It is unclear if medical students applying to emergency medicine (EM) prioritize the same items as program directors. **Objective:** We sought to determine medical student perception of the importance of each factor of the NRMP application to an EM residency. **Methods:** This was a cross-sectional study approved by the Institutional Review Board at an academic tertiary care Level I trauma center. A pilot-tested and validated survey tool was given to all medical students rotating in EM during an 18-month period. The students ranked each application item on a 5-point scale (1 = not important and 5 = very important) with verbal anchors. **Results:** Of 136 medical students, 85.3% responded. Excluded were 31% who were not planning to apply to EM, leaving 80 responses for analysis. Items ranked higher were EM rotation grade, interview, clinical rotation grades, and letters of recommendation. Less emphasis was placed on Alpha Omega Alpha (AOA) honor society status, publication in medical literature, and personal statement. Items most agreed upon and believed to be most important by the students were EM rotation grade, interviews, and clinical rotation grades. **Conclusions:** This is similar to previously reported rankings by program directors. Although medical students agreed on the importance of most aspects of the NRMP application, areas of discordance included emphasis on extracurricular activities and AOA. This can have implications for medical student mentoring and advising. © 2016 Elsevier Inc.

Keywords—residency application; match; emergency medicine; medical student perspective; program directors

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, more than 31,000 fourth-year medical students participated in the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP). Of those, 8,421 applicants went unmatched. There were 1,300 applicants from the United States (US) who only applied to an emergency medicine (EM) residency program, with 5.0% who did not match. While the EM unmatched number compares favorably with the fields of dermatology (8.2%), surgery (9.2%), otolaryngology (14.3%), and orthopedic surgery (18.1%), it leads to far more unsuccessful matches than are seen for US applicants in obstetrics and gynecology (3.7%), anesthesiology (1.9%), internal medicine (1.9%) and family medicine (1.8%) (1). Although there might be many reasons for an unsuccessful match, it is possible that medical students might undervalue some factors considered important by EM residency program selection committees. Furthermore, it is possible that advice medical student applicants obtain from their peers, medical school deans, or other trusted advisors about what to place in applications and how to best present that application might diverge from the issues that programs are most interested in. Identifying these issues and then narrowing this gap

could lead to students who are better prepared for the EM residency application process.

We sought to determine factors medical students rotating on an EM elective who are applying for EM residency positions thought are the most important in their NRMP application.

METHODS

Study Design

This was an Institutional Review Board–approved, anonymous, voluntary, cross-sectional survey.

Setting

Our facility is a single-community, academic tertiary care referral Level I trauma center with an ED annual census of >170,000 visits per year.

Selection of Participants

Medical students rotating in an EM clerkship.

Protocol and Measurements

A survey tool was modeled after the Crane and Ferraro survey using the tailored design method and validated using qualitative interview techniques during pilot testing in a sample of the target population (2,3). The validated survey was handed to students in paper form during an orientation meeting. Instructions were given and the surveys were completed without the presence of any resident or attending physicians. The surveys were then immediately collected. Demographic data including age, sex, type of medical school attended, and year in medical school training were obtained. Students were also asked whether they intended to use the NRMP, apply to an EM residency program, and had met with an EM advisor at their medical school.

The students then were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale (with verbal anchors for 1 = not important and 5 = very important) how important they felt each element of the EM NRMP application was. The survey tool is available in [Appendix 1](#).

Data Analysis

Answers from the survey were included in the data analysis only if the demographic data indicated that the student was a fourth-year medical student intending to participate in the NRMP application process for an EM residency position. Data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel (Redmond, WA).

RESULTS

During enrollment from June 2010 to December 2011, one hundred and sixteen of the 136 rotating students completed the survey tool, for a response rate of 85.3%. Thirty-six responses were not included because the student did not intend to apply for an EM residency, leaving 80 survey responses for analysis. Males comprised 65% of the included responses. Allopathic respondents made up 72.5% of the analyzed surveys, and the remaining were from osteopathic programs. The mean age of the included respondents was 27.4 years, with a standard deviation (SD) of 2.77 years. Items showing the greatest inter-respondent consistency were EM rotation grade, interviews, and clinical rotation grades. [Table 1](#) shows the highest-ranking items were EM rotation grade (mean \pm SD = 4.91 ± 0.33), interview (4.78 ± 0.45), clinical rotation grades (4.74 ± 0.52), and letters of recommendation (4.33 ± 0.69). Less importance was given to AOA honor society status (2.89 ± 0.99), publication in medical literature (2.73 ± 0.95), and personal statement (2.73 ± 0.98).

DISCUSSION

The present study suggests that medical students who plan to apply for an EM residency view their EM rotation grade as the most important factor for their application. This is important in that students are expressing an understanding that their performance in the ED environment is viewed highly by program directors as a predictor of future resident performance in the ED. Other studies validate that medical student performance in areas specific to their future residency do predict their success in said residency (4). Understanding the importance of their EM rotation means that students will prepare well and work hard and enthusiastically during their rotation.

The student respondents also placed high importance on the interview. The medical students recognize the interview as an opportunity to express their personalities and emphasize the strengths of their application, while also personally addressing any deficiencies in their application. The third and fourth highest ranked criteria were clinical grades and letters of recommendation. Both criteria, again, address the student's clinical skills and application of knowledge. Knowing the importance of these criteria means that the student will focus during each clinical rotation, as each is applicable to the field of EM, as we see patients with a myriad of complaints. Similarly, students will ensure that respected faculty who think highly of the applicant write their letters of recommendation.

Examination criteria, such as *US Medical Licensing Examination Steps I and II* were given intermediate

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