

Diagnostic Radiology Resident Recruitment Part II: Advice to Applicants From Vice Chairs for Education

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Applicants to diagnostic radiology residencies often obtain advice regarding the process, typically from local individuals. Materials available on the Internet contribute to this process as well. We are a group of current and former Diagnostic Radiology Residency Program Directors and current Vice Chairs for Education who commonly advise medical students, including regarding radiology as a career. This work is meant to provide a “plain talk” resource for those considering a career in radiology via a radiology residency, written from the point of view of an advisor with lots of experience.

Key Words: Application; director; education; interview; medical student; program; recruitment; resident.

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We are a group of Vice Chairs for Education who belong to a group called ADVICER (1,2) and are interested in sharing some advice to diagnostic radiology (DR) residency applicants based on our many years of experience. We are all either current or previous program directors (PDs), have reviewed many thousands of applications, and have interviewed thousands of candidates. Although we have chosen to focus on DR, it is our sincere hope and expectation that it will be useful for interventional radiology (IR) as well. It is also our hope that others in Graduate Medical Education (GME) may find this work useful. Please note that our opinions may not necessarily be those of ADVICER.

An online document from several authors connected to AMSER (The Association of Medical Student Educators in Radiology) (3) entitled “AMSER Guide to Applying for Radiology Residency” (4) provides extensive information and advice. Our work here is meant to complement this (4) and

other resources already available online or in the literature including but not limited to *Apps of Steel* by Donna Magid (5) and the AAMC (American Association of Medical Colleges) Careers in Medicine website (6). We have chosen to organize this work on the yearly application cycle. The following is not meant to be all-inclusive and is Part II of a two-part series (the other is focused on advice to DR Residency PDs and Programs).

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW SEASON STARTS

Experiences

There is significant variation among applicants regarding when they confirm their interest to apply to their specialty of choice. Some may have prior experience and interest from interactions with family members as a child, personal experience as a patient, or research in college or during medical school. Radiology tends to attract medical students later in their medical school careers, possibly at the end of MS3 or even early MS4.

If a student has any interest in applying for radiology residency, it is prudent for them to reach out to the institution’s radiology PD to seek advice. This meeting should be used for fact checking and self-assessment. Students should be open to providing information relevant to their potential application. It is better to know if one is not going to be a competitive applicant for a certain program sooner rather than later (eg, after the Match). This meeting is not necessary, but is advisable. In fact, in some schools, the Dean’s office recommends a specialty advisor to help guide all MS3 with planning their

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fourth year schedules and electives. When meeting with the specialty advisor, students should be concise and take notes on all the information so that they can make an informed decision during the application season. If students are doing an elective in another institution, it is recommended that they meet with the PD there briefly to improve the chances that their application will be reviewed by that program.

Research during medical school may be desired or required and may augment an application in radiology. Research and publications in other fields may still be quite useful if the student did not originally have the intention of applying for radiology residency or there is a demonstration of excellence with this work. However, if one is applying for radiology residency, at least one radiology research project is advisable with potential publication in radiology journals or presentation at relevant national or international meetings. The project can be relatively small (eg, case report or educational exhibit) and the candidate may be able to secure a recommendation letter from the Radiology faculty member, which may enhance the application. Obtaining funding and working on larger projects, while more desirable, may not be feasible. Research may be less of a priority for applicants to community-based residency programs. However, scholarly activity during radiology residency is an ACGME (Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education) requirement for all Diagnostic Radiology Residency Programs (7). The Association of University Radiologists has many resources for the students to get involved in research and to apply for grants (8).

MS4 electives are important and focus should be put on a student's areas of strength and demonstration of excellence. Participation in subinternships in Internal Medicine or General Surgery may enhance an application. Intensive care unit rotations may be helpful in order to prepare for internship and, in some cases, residency. A few (ie, 0–2) radiology or IR electives may be beneficial but this should not be overdone as some reviewers will view this as a negative factor.

Away rotations (externships) are optional and not necessary for many students. If a medical school does not offer a radiology clerkship or adequate radiology elective experience, an externship is advisable. An externship gives the student an opportunity to solidify their interest in radiology and showcase enthusiasm toward their specialty of choice. Also, if the applicant has a special interest in a specific geographical area away from their school, an away rotation in that area may increase the chances of being considered a serious applicant.

Leadership and extracurricular activities during medical school are another important aspect of the application. If the school has a Radiology Interest Group (9), we think that the student should join and get involved as soon as possible. In the earlier stages, the student should obtain valuable information and become abreast of available resources such as available research projects. Later on, the student should consider taking a leadership position in the group and mentoring the junior members. If the school does not have a Radiology Interest Group, the school or a group of students may consider

establishing one. Taking initiative and navigating through bureaucratic hurdles is a significant accomplishment which will likely be noticed on an application. Another example of this is successfully completing an institutional review board application.

Many schools offer a mock interview session for students. A first real interview may not go as well as one would want and thus students should strongly consider taking advantage of this opportunity. If a mock interview program is not offered at the school, we suggest that a request be made to the medical school leadership to start one.

The Application

It is advisable that applications be complete as of the first day that they are available to training programs on ERAS (Electronic Residency Application Service) (10). Many programs start reviewing submitted immediately when the applications become available online. In addition, many programs have “rolling” interview offers where interview appointments are offered until completely filled—thus, the earlier a candidate has a complete application, the better. For application materials that the candidate does not have control over (eg, letters of recommendation [LORs]), the applicant should monitor the situation and manage it with gentle reminders. It is advisable to start early and be highly organized in this process.

To help with focus, one of the primary goals with a residency application is to create a situation where the program wants to offer an interview. One approach is to “tell a story” where the applicant describes who they are and who they want to become, hopefully with supporting evidence. For example, what can a future PD expect from this candidate? Does this applicant want to be the next great researcher in radiology? An applicant has control over this in a personal statement (PS) and how they respond to the other application questions.

What is entered into the application should be correct and complete. We know reviewers who will fact check, even in the PS and hobbies sections. As well, relevant information regarding jobs should be included, such as supervisor, dates of service, and why the job ended. We are also aware of interviewers who will ask questions about research or jobs that are listed and therefore a candidate should be prepared to discuss these.

“Red flags” in applications are commonly searched-for by residency programs. These include missing time, failing grade(s), failing USMLE (United States Medical Licensing Examination) (11) test(s), academic or professional punishments including probation, changing training programs, changing medical schools, “mediocre” LORs, “mediocre” MSPE (Medical Student Performance Evaluation, aka “Dean’s letter”) (10), low class rank, errors or omissions in the application, and “concerning” responses to the application essay questions or PS.

Regarding LORs, programs commonly provide a minimum and a maximum number; it is not advisable to send a number

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