

APDIM Statement on Post-Interview Communication & Second Visits (released June 2014)

Post-Interview Communication

Introduction

Practices regarding post-interview communication vary widely and are often problematic for programs and applicants. Programs can voluntarily adopt and refer their applicants to this APDIM recommendation as an objective statement / guideline “published” and promoted by an official organization. This statement promote clear communication that avoids confusing and potentially deceptive language that undermines the spirit of the Main Residency Match.

While adherence to these guidelines is optional, compliance with the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) rules and regulations is not. Program practices around communications with applicants must comply with NRMP rules. All residency program directors and personnel who communicate with applicants should familiarize themselves with these rules, particularly, the NRMP’s Code of Conduct (<http://www.nrmp.org/code-of-conduct/>) and Statement on Professionalism (<http://www.nrmp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Policies.Statement-on-Professionalism.docx.pdf>), which addresses the issue of misleading communications.

The Current State of Post-Interview Communication

- Current approaches to post-interview communication from programs regarding an applicant’s chances of matching in the program vary widely from no communication at all to frequent statements that an applicant will be “ranked to match,” “ranked highly,” or “would fit well.”
- At many programs, program directors and staff expend a great deal of time and energy communicating with interviewed applicants.
- A significant number of students (23.4% in one study) report that communication from programs regarding their likelihood of matching leads them to change their rank lists. Students may be interpreting communications from program directors as indications of interest; alternately, programs may be making statements that are intended to influence where students rank their program. In either case, programs sending communications about an applicant’s likelihood of matching may have a competitive advantage over those who do not. This sort of gamesmanship, while not in violation of explicit match rules, violates the spirit of the match, which is intended to maintain a level playing field for applicants and programs and to eliminate any type of coercion or manipulation of applicants.
- Close to 20% of students in one study felt assured that they would match at a program, ranked it first, and did not match there, indicating that communication from programs can be misleading regardless of the program’s actual intent.
- Uncertainty about how to communicate with programs following the interview creates stress for the majority of students.

Communication Between Program and Applicant

APDIM encourages programs to adopt policies that limit communications to factual programmatic information that is communicated to all applicants. If programs do engage in more personal communication, APDIM offers the following guidelines.

1. **Language:** Programs should be precise and honest in their communications with applicants. Language that is misleading, unclear or nuanced should be avoided. Terms such as "ranked to match" should only be used if a candidate is ranked in a position numbered less than the positions you are filling (a so-called "lock" position), or the meaning fully explained to the applicant. For example, if you use the term "ranked to match" to mean that you are ranking an applicant higher than your program historically fills, but not in a lock position, then that should be explained to the applicant. **APDIM recommends that any phrase that is ambiguous (e.g. "ranked highly") be avoided or its meaning fully explained.** Communications should not confuse or mislead an applicant for the purpose of gaining a competitive advantage for the program.
2. **Rank position:** Interestingly, NRMP rules do not prohibit a program from communicating an applicant's rank position. Of course, this information must be accurate (and is likely not known until late in the recruitment process) and the program may not ask the applicant where he or she is ranking the program. NRMP explicitly prohibits the solicitation of statements implying a commitment. **APDIM recommends that any communication from the program that includes a statement of where that applicant will be ranked, explicitly indicate that the program is not, and cannot solicit similar information from the applicant.**
3. **Communications from the applicant:** Programs should discourage routine thank you notes or e-mails from interviewed applicants and indicate that such communications will not routinely receive a reply. Interviewed applicants with objective questions about the program (e.g. number of required months of ICU experience; availability of opportunities for community service, etc) should direct those questions only to individuals on the program's approved contacts list (see item #4, below), which will ensure accuracy and consistency of responses.
4. **Personnel:** Programs should identify a limited number of individuals who will communicate with applicants, and ensure that they fully understand the program's expectations around such communications and are familiar with the NRMP rules. Applicants should be informed who these individuals are and be discouraged from communicating with other program personnel.

Second Visits

Introduction

Students currently receive mixed messages from programs and from advisors regarding the advisability of making second visits. Some students believe that making a second visit to a program will make a strong positive impact on their ability to match at that program. On the other hand, feedback from program directors suggests that the impact of second visits is actually quite limited. At the same time, second visits are expensive and can be risky since a brief visit may create an inaccurate, negative impression, especially if the applicant feels awkward or nervous in stressful situations. We suggest the following policies to address these issues.

Recommended Approach to Second Visits

- Programs should inform interviewed applicants, in writing, that second visits are neither required nor encouraged.
- Faculty advising applicants should tell them that second visits should be requested only if the applicant believes the second visit will help with their own rank list decisions.

NRMP Code of Conduct (excerpt)

To promote the highest ethical standards during the interview, ranking, and matching processes, program directors participating in a Match shall commit to:

- **Respecting an applicant's right to privacy and confidentiality** - Program directors and other interviewers may freely express their interest in a candidate, but they shall not require an applicant to disclose ranking preferences, ranking intentions, or the locations of other programs to which the applicant has or may apply.
- **Accepting responsibility for the actions of recruitment team members** - Program directors shall instruct all interviewers about compliance with Match policies and the need to ensure that all applicant interviews are conducted in an atmosphere that is safe, respectful, and nonjudgmental. Program directors shall assume responsibility for the actions of the entire interview team.
- **Refraining from asking illegal or coercive questions** - Program directors shall recognize the negative consequences that can result from questions about age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and family status, and shall ensure that communication with applicants remains focused on the applicant's goodness of fit within their programs.
- **Declining to require second visits or visiting rotations** - 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 visits are used in determining applicant placement on a rank order list.
- **Discouraging unnecessary post-interview communication** - 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.