

## **The basics of SOAP: The Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program**

Monday, April 29, 2013

The Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program®, or SOAP®, is the process during Match Week by which unmatched applicants can apply to and hopefully accept offers from the pool of unfilled positions. SOAP replaced the “scramble” in 2012 to provide some order to the chaotic and difficult process of securing residency positions by students who initially fail to match, either fully or partially (i.e., matched to a preliminary position but not an advanced or matched to an advanced position but not a preliminary).

Here’s how SOAP works:

The week before Match Week (generally, the second week of March), medical schools (the ECFMG for international medical graduate applicants) certify with the National Resident Matching Program® (NRMP®) whether each applicant will be eligible to enter graduate medical education on July 1 in the year of the Match. Students whose eligibility is not certified are unable to participate in SOAP should they remain unmatched after the matching algorithm is processed.

Match Week begins at 12 noon ET on Monday (generally, the third week of March), with the simultaneous release of the unfilled residency programs and the unmatched applicant information. Applicants who initially failed to partially or fully match can then begin preparing their applications for open positions using ERAS, which is the required method for both applicants to send and programs to receive materials. ERAS begins transmitting students’ applications to participating programs at 2 p.m. ET. SOAP participants can only submit ERAS applications for the categorical, preliminary, and advanced unfilled positions for which they’re eligible.

A time-out period occurs until Wednesday at 12 noon ET, during which programs cannot offer any positions. This break allows students to apply to unfilled positions and programs time to review applications and conduct program-initiated telephone interviews.

“Applicants express their program preferences by sending ERAS applications and cannot contact, or have anyone else contact, programs on their behalf,” says Mona Signer, executive director of the NRMP. “Under SOAP, all contact must be initiated by programs based upon the ERAS applications they receive.”

Beginning Tuesday at 11:30 a.m. ET, programs can submit to the NRMP preference lists of applicants to whom they would like to offer positions. Programs must finalize their preference lists by 11:30 a.m. ET on Wednesday, and at 12 noon ET, the first offer round begins. At the beginning of each offer round, the NRMP electronically sends offers to students, who are

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provided a two-hour window to accept or decline a position. If a student declines a position, the next student on the program's preference list will be contacted during the next offer round.

Applicants can receive multiple offers, and once a position is filled, it's removed from the list of unfilled programs. Also, the NRMP Match Participation Agreement includes SOAP activity, so once a student accepts an offer, an electronic handshake binds the deal. Offer rounds continue every three hours (i.e., 3 p.m. ET on Wednesday; 9 a.m., 12 noon, and 3 p.m. ET on Thursday) through the fifth round on Thursday afternoon when SOAP concludes.

Match Day ceremonies occur at 12 noon ET on Friday to provide enough time for as many applicants as possible to match through SOAP.

Most positions are filled on Wednesday, and there are many more applicants than positions in SOAP. So unmatched applicants who receive an offer in the early rounds should carefully consider whether to reject it in the hope they'll receive another offer in later rounds. And typically, about 50 percent of positions available through SOAP are preliminary internal medicine or surgery positions that don't lead to complete residency training in a specialty. Your best bet: Gauge your competitiveness carefully when applying for residency positions and avoid SOAP altogether.