

Match advice from a successful fourth-year student

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Choices spoke with Kamran Ahmed, a fourth-year medical student at the Mayo Medical School in Rochester, Minn., who matched into radiation oncology at the Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Fla., and a preliminary medicine year at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, in the 2012 Match. Ahmed discusses his successful match experience in a very competitive field and offers advice for the residency application process.

How important was the advice you received from either a specialty advisor or your medical school in the match process?

My assistant dean was extremely helpful in explaining the application process and timetable for collecting letters of recommendation, writing my personal statement, and creating my ERAS application. Since I was entering a subspecialty, the guidance of my home institution's program director was also vital. She helped me assess my competitiveness for radiation oncology as well as choose the appropriate letter writers and best away rotations. She also reviewed my CV and application. The whole process can seem overwhelming, and it's great to have open communication with mentors who are experienced advisors.

What's the most important piece of advice you would offer students seeking a successful match?

Think about the application process early and solicit advice from multiple sources. Talk to assistant deans, faculty, and the program director at your home institution. Also reach out to previous graduates from your medical school who've successfully matched in your desired specialty to tap their wisdom about the application process, the interview trail, and residency. Their guidance will help you strengthen your application and make better decisions. Some of the best advice I received was from a graduate of my medical school who is now a first-year resident. He helped me strengthen my personal statement, advised me on letters of recommendation, and prepared me for interviews.

Do you feel like the Match has become more competitive, and did that affect how you approached the match process?

I was told by my assistant dean and others that the number of applicants in the Match is increasing without a corresponding increase in the number of graduate medical education spots. The news made me more cautious, made me assess whether I was a strong applicant for my specialty choice, and made me consider a back-up plan. It's definitely important to have the support of your school and mentors. No one can make any guarantees during the Match, but as long as you're passionate about what you're doing, follow the advice of your deans and mentors, and have support, everything will work out.