

Don't Forget to Ask: Advice from Residents on What to Ask During the Residency Interview

The process of applying and interviewing for a residency position is complicated and can be stressful. This process involves both “selling” yourself to a program, as well as collecting the information that you will need in deciding how to rank the various programs you visit. Programs that you consider will all have unique strengths and weaknesses—some of which may not immediately apparent. The following list of questions was created by residents and students from various backgrounds as a guide to assist you in identifying and assessing those strengths and weaknesses. Use this guide in constructing your own more specific questions, and in exploring your own expectations and preferences. Your residency training is an important experience. Identifying the program that is best suited to meet your educational and professional expectations is paramount. Some questions are best answered by other residents in the program, and some questions you will need to ask yourself. Ask the program administrators and residents for specific examples that give a true understanding of the program.

Be honest with yourself about how you want your residency experience to be structured. Good luck! And remember, always be yourself.

Education

- Is there an orientation program for incoming residents?
- Is there a formal didactic curriculum, and what is its structure?
- What are the informal learning opportunities (i.e., bedside rounds, etc.)?
- What programs exist for resident education (e.g., lectures, journal clubs, grand rounds, board review courses,)?
- Is there a feedback structure that allows for the resident to evaluate the program’s curriculum?
- Is attendance at regional and national conferences encouraged? Is it funded, and, if so, to what degree?
- What are the required rotations for the first year? Subsequent years?
- Are there any required rotations that take place outside of the city?
- Are there opportunities to do “away” rotations?
- Is there a formal mentoring program for new residents, and do faculty serve as mentors?

Research Opportunities

- Are research opportunities provided to residents? Is this a required experience?
- Is there a possibility of “protected” time for research?
- How are fellowships handled?

Teaching Responsibilities

- What teaching responsibilities for medical students are expected of residents?
- If residents have teaching responsibilities, how much time per week is spent with students? Is it “protected”?
- Is there any formal training for residents on how to teach students and other learners effectively, and how to provide feedback?

Clinical Duties

- What is the general call schedule?
- What provisions are made for back-up call or sick-call coverage?
- What type of structure for supervision is in place?
- Do your residents express that there is an appropriate balance between independence and supervision?
- How does the resident’s autonomy change as he/she progresses through the program?
- What type of ancillary support is available (phlebotomy, respiratory therapy, social workers, etc.)?
- Does the general volume of clinical responsibility support a balance between service and education?
- Do your residents express they are involved in too much non-educational activity (i.e., “scut work”)?

Resident Performance

- How often are residents evaluated?
- What is the structure of the evaluation (forms, face-to-face, etc.)?
- What other forms of feedback does the resident receive (in-training exam, etc.)?
- What support structures are in place for residents in academic need?

Program Performance

- What is the status of the program's accreditation?
- If there were any citations at the last review, what has been done to correct them?
- When is the next Residency Review Committee (RRC) review?
- Are there any plans for changing the program size or structure?
- What is the status of the last Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) Institutional Review?
- How solid is the financial status of the sponsoring institution?
- How committed is your institution to resident education and graduate medical education in general? How is this evidenced?
- What percent of your residents complete your program?
- What percent of your graduates pass the specialty boards on their first attempt?
- Where do your graduates go (e.g., fellowship, academics, private practice)?

Employment Issues

- What are the basic resident benefits?
- Is parking a concern for residents at your program?
- Are meals paid for when on call?
- What is your family leave policy?
- Is there reimbursement for educational supplies and books?
- Are moonlighting opportunities available?
- What are the rules for moonlighting?
- How are residents represented at the institution level? How is the resident member of GMEC selected?
- Is there a union? Is membership mandatory? Are there dues?
- Is there a House Officers Association?

Questions to specifically ask other Residents

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?
- Would you consider the same program if applying again?
- Is there an appropriate balance between service obligations and the educational program?
- Is there enough ancillary support to minimize "scut"?
- What has changed since you came to the program?
- Is the program responsive to suggestions for change?
- How accessible is the faculty?
- Is the relationship with faculty collegial?
- Do the residents get along with one another?
- How do your residents get along with residents in other programs?
- In what activities are you involved outside of the program?
- How does your spouse/significant other like the city/area?

Questions to ask Yourself

Finally, you will likely find yourself facing a decision between one of several programs which are all extremely similar from academic and patient-care standpoints. At this time, it is very important to consider factors relating to your personal happiness and comfort for the duration of your residency.

- Can I be happy working in this program and with these people?
- Am I confident in the program and the sponsoring institution?
- Are there factors that make this place (city/town/rural area) an attractive place for me to live during my residency? (Factors that you may include are proximity to immediate and extended family, happiness of spouse/significant other, housing, cost of living, quality of secondary school system, community opportunities, and recreational activities.)