

Career Counseling in Otolaryngology

Frequently-Asked Questions

This booklet has been prepared by the Department of Otolaryngology in response to questions frequently asked by medical students who wish to explore the training and career opportunities in this field. We hope that it will be helpful to students and serve as a basis of discussion in individual meetings with faculty members and residents.

- **Can you give me a brief description of the field? What are the key elements of this field that define it?**

Otolaryngology is a specialty that deals with diseases, disorders and malformations of the head and neck region. Although otolaryngology is considered to be a surgical subspecialty, many conditions encountered by the practitioner are treated without surgery. The field is frequently divided further into numerous disciplines including otology, rhinology, laryngology and voice disorders, head-and-neck surgery, allergy, pediatric otolaryngology, maxillofacial trauma and facial plastic-reconstructive surgery.

- **What is the patient population that I will encounter? Will it include both children and adults? Will there be emergency work? What types of technology will I encounter?** You will encounter patients of all ages. There is generally not a lot of emergency work, although one does occasionally get called to participate in emergency management of the upper airway. Office practice includes use of otomicroscopes and nasopharyngolaryngoscopes for comprehensive examination of the head and neck. Videodocumentation of the findings in the head and neck is a burgeoning field. In the operating room, one uses lasers, microscopes, and numerous forms of advanced technology, including recent expansion to include robots and image-guided instrumentation.
- **Is it possible to describe the personality characteristics of many physicians in this field?** Most physicians are interested in patients of all ages. They must be able to integrate the head-and-neck findings with the patient's overall medical condition and this requires knowledge of general medical diseases. Although some patients are treated quickly and released from the practice, others require a commitment to long-term care. As with all physicians, the otolaryngologist must achieve a good balance between personal and professional lives.
- **How long is the training program/residency?** Five years
- **Are there fellowships available after residency?** Yes. There are fellowships in otology/neurotology, head-and-neck surgery, endocrine surgery, facial plastic and reconstructive surgery, rhinology, laryngology and pediatric otolaryngology.

- **How do I know if my academic record/grades will make me a suitable applicant?** The successful applicant has excellent grades (including many honors grades) and solid letters of recommendation from faculty who know the applicant well.
- **What is the role of my USMLE Step 1 score?** In the 2011 NRMP match, the mean USMLE Step 1 score for US senior applicants who matched in Otolaryngology was 243. **What is a competitive score to qualify for an interview?** Competitive scores to qualify for an interview are generally 220 and above. **If I failed Step 1 what are my options? Should I take Step 2 early?** The student who fails Step 1 is unlikely to qualify for an interview.
- **Do I need a Step 2 Clinical Knowledge score to be screened for an interview? To be ranked?** Although all positive information is helpful when being screened for an interview, most programs do not require you to have a Step 2 Clinical Knowledge score. In the 2011 NRMP match, the mean USMLE Step 2 score for US senior applicants who matched in Otolaryngology was 250
- **Is there anything that I can do in my rotation or elective experience in this field to enhance my qualifications?** All positive aspects of performance enhance one's qualifications, including demonstrating a solid fund of basic science knowledge and the ability to apply it appropriately to clinical discussions. Good history-taking and physical examinations skills are important. It is critical to be able to make an informative, accurate and complete patient presentation on rounds. It is also important to be well-prepared for surgery by reading about the case before entering the OR. Above all, one is expected to demonstrate the ability to function efficiently as a member of the multidisciplinary healthcare team.
- **Should I take outside electives in other institutions? If so, how many are advised and allowed?** It is perfectly acceptable to take one outside elective in order to gain further exposure to the field and to explore other institutions. However, we do not encourage more than one elective since that could impair the student's overall curricular experiences.
- **If your field requires a preliminary year what are your recommendations regarding that year?** Otolaryngology does not require a preliminary year since all years, PGY1-PGY5 are managed by the department.
- **Is a research experience important in my application to this field? Do I need to do a one year research experience? Will research offset a low Step 1 score? Should I have publications to qualify for your field?** Having research experience in some area of medicine is usually helpful, particularly if the applicant can demonstrate that she/he has defined a hypothesis, gathered data, prepared a written document summarizing the research and communicated it to a peer or faculty group. Simply engaging in laboratory work without making it a valuable education experience is not a good use of time.

- **Is community service important in my application to this field?** Most successful applicants have engaged in community or volunteer service and many have had leadership roles in that service
- **What do you advise on obtaining letters of recommendation? Should they all be from the field? How many should I have? Do I need a chair's letter? If so, how do I obtain that letter?** Letters of recommendation from faculty in otolaryngology and other fields are very helpful. It is important for the applicant to be well-known to the faculty writing the letters. When requesting a letter, it is good to request a personal interview and to present a summary of your grades, extracurricular activities, research, community service and other aspects of your background, as well as to remind the faculty member of your experience in his or her department.
- **How do I meet with residents in the field and ask them to share their experiences and advice? Can I find residents with educational backgrounds similar to mine?** You will meet otolaryngology residents in our 5 hospitals (UHB, LICH, KCHC, VA and Maimonides). They will be happy to share their experiences with you. They have all come from major academic medical centers and have backgrounds similar to yours.
- **If I want to learn more about the field, can you recommend how I do that?** The Department of Otolaryngology has numerous faculty advisors who have agreed to meet with all students who wish to explore the field. You can easily call the departmental office 718 270-1638 and ask for an appointment. You can also e-mail
- Richard M. Rosenfeld MD (Richard.Rosenfeld@downstate.edu),
- Frank E. Lucente MD (Frank.Lucente@downstate.edu) or
- Nira A. Goldstein MD (Nira.Goldstein@downstate.edu)

to request an appointment. The departmental website also provides relevant information. You are also encouraged to join the on-campus ENT Club and participate in the meetings.