INTERVIEW PREPARATION FOR RESIDENCY

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First impressions are usually lasting and can only be made once!

A first impression is based not only what you are wearing. People also perceive:

how you LOOK, how you MOVE and how you SOUND
**The Interview**

The interview may be the most important factor used in the selection of residents (according to survey of residency program directors).

- **Never underestimate the importance of the interview** – A great interview may just get you that position.

- **If you are selected for an interview, it means the program considers you a competitive candidate.**

- **Get your applications in early for the best choice of interview dates!**
Practice interviewing. This will organize your thoughts and help you answer questions clearly. Ask someone (friend, classmate, spouse, family member) to conduct a “mock interview”.

Make a list of the top five things you want a program to know about you. This could include goals, values, accomplishments and abilities. What makes you unique / a good candidate?

Know the program: Research! Review all the information you have received. View the website. Be familiar with key faculty. Speak with alumni who have interviewed at - or matched into - the programs to which you are applying.

Ask well thought out questions to demonstrate interest and preparation.

Know the specialty. What do practitioners do? What types of procedures do they perform? Are there opportunities for sub-specialty training? What do they value as a specialty? Be prepared to answer why you have chosen this specialty, program and area of country.

Check your Facebook page (and other social media) to be sure there is nothing unprofessional or incriminating lurking in cyberspace. (Set Facebook to “private”). Watch what you say on blogs. Program directors / administrators will likely “Google” you!

Know your CV and personal statement. Any information is ‘fair game’ for questions! Be ready to answer questions on your research – what you did, outcomes, experience gained.

Be prepared to discuss your strengths and weaknesses.
Interview Suit

Look like a successful physician - not a student!
Inspire Confidence!

- **SUIT** (professional, neat, comfortable and conservative):
  - Jacket / pants **or** jacket / skirt cut from same cloth
  - Make sure it is free of tags, pulls lint and wrinkles!
  - Make sure it fits - not too large, not too small!

- **Black, dark blue, medium / dark gray.**

- **Women:** pantsuit or skirt suit
  - Skirt: NOT too short - at knee or just above, no slit
  - Blouse underneath: preferably solid (or very subtle pattern): Avoid low cut.
  - Sheer hosiery

- **Men:** single-breasted, 2- or 3-button jacket.

- **SHOES:** simple, closed toe, low heel (for women)
**Bags**

Black or dark color, no studs, tassels, or logos

**Portfolio**

Black, brown, maroon

**Accessories**

Belt should match shoes

**BRING NOTES, PAPER, PEN AND AN ADDITIONAL COPY OF YOUR CREDENTIALS**
**Personal Grooming**

**Hair**
- **Women:** well-groomed, tied back if long
- **Men:** well-groomed, clean shaven

**Nails**
- **Women:** short-medium length
- **Men:** clean, buffed, trimmed

**Make-up**
- Natural / healthy-looking
- Do not use too much!

**Hygiene**
- Shower that day
- Use deodorant
- All clean clothes
- *Very light* perfume / cologne, if any
Plan strategically - Schedule the interview at the programs in which you are most interested after you have some interview experience. Plan on a full day for your interview and possibly a dinner the evening before. Try to see the hospital and clinic facilities during your interview and spend time where there are residents to get a sense of the working environment.

Do not “No Show” for an interview. This is a small community - other programs will find out.

Be on time. Call to confirm your appointment date, time and location. Consider a “Dry run”.

Keep your cell phone OFF!

Be polite, gracious and courteous - How you interact with others is extremely important!
Be respectful to all those you encounter!
Be confident, energetic and pleasant.
Employers are looking for someone who will fit in – not cause conflict.
Be honest. Answer questions directly.

Make eye contact and offer firm handshake. Be aware of body language - good posture.

Let them know that you are interested in the program. Use positive words - show enthusiasm and be a great listener. Express passion for your field, patient care, etc.

Do not speak negatively about your medical school, professors, courses or administration. You are not only representing yourself, but NYIT College of Osteopathic Medicine as well.
**What they are looking for? Some key traits:**

**How compatible are you with their program?**

**Are you reliable, professional, flexible and cheerful?**

**Can they entrust you with their patients?**

**Will you fit in? Can you do the job?**

**Are you someone they can work with for 3+ years?**

**What you can add to the program?**

**How well does the program meet your goals?**

**Are you sincerely interested in this program?**
** Don’t just TELL me, *SELL* me!
Be a “DO-er”, not a “SAY-er” **

How did you handle hospital-based situations?
(patient care, teamwork, leadership, interdisciplinary collaboration, multi-tasking, prioritization, etc.)

Be *SPECIFIC*
(Do not theorize or generalize).
Include context, action and results.
Behavioral Questions!

Behavioral interviewing is based on discovering how the interviewee acted in specific employment-related situations. The logic is that past performance predicts future performance. Behavioral questions will be more specific than traditional interview questions:

(S.T.A.R. Method = SITUATION, TASK, ACTION, RESULTS):

- A specific situation
- The tasks that needed to be done
- The action you took
- The results i.e. what happened

Questions in a Behavioral Interview

- Tell me about a stressful situation you experienced in medical school and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a time you made a mistake and had to tell a resident or an attending.
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
- Have you handled a difficult situation with a patient? How?
- Give me an example of a time when you delegated a project effectively?
- Share a rewarding team experience.

Consider some special situations you have dealt with or projects you have worked on. You may be able to use them to help frame responses. Prepare stories that illustrate times when you have successfully solved problems or performed memorably. The stories will be useful to help you respond meaningfully in a behavioral interview.
GROUP INTERVIEWS

Two main ways program leadership / administration / faculty / residents conduct “group” interviews:

1) A **panel** interviews a **single** candidate

2) An **interviewer or panel** interviews a **group of candidates** **together**:

- Each candidate gets **SAME** question: Last candidate asked either has the **advantage** of time to prepare or the **disadvantage** of having to simultaneously come up with a unique answer.
- Interviewer is interested in how well the candidate interacts with the group.
- For example: **“What led you to pursue this specialty?”**
  - If you feel someone already answered the question how you would, when it’s your turn, say:
  - **“As Student X also said, my interest in this specialty stems from my experience during my clinical rotation”**, then elaborate on your unique experience. **Acknowledging** what someone else has said, and drawing on it, demonstrates significant **interpersonal** skills.
- Each candidate gets a **DIFFERENT** question and the group is asked to comment.
- Example: They describe an **ethical dilemma** and say **“Student X, how would you handle such a dilemma?”**
- When Student X has finished answering, the interviewer asks Student Y:
  - **“So what do you think of what Student X said? Would you handle it the same way?”**
  - If you disagree, say so but delicately:
  - **“I can see where Student X was coming from but, in my experience, I’ve found it’s better to handle it by, etc.”**

**What are they looking for in these potentially “awkward” scenarios?**

- Does the candidate **handle pressure** well?
- Will the candidate **speak up** in challenging situations?
- Can the candidate **communicate effectively (modestly and respectfully)** in an challenging construct?
QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED

TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF.

WHY (SPECIALTY NAME)?

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR PREVIOUS CLINICAL EXPERIENCE IN (SPECIALTY NAME)?

WHY SHOULD WE CHOOSE YOU?

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR MEDICAL EDUCATION.

PRESENT A CASE THAT YOU HANDLED DURING MEDICAL SCHOOL.

DO YOU HAVE ANY PUBLICATIONS? RESEARCH ACTIVITY? LEADERSHIP ROLES? ELABORATE.

HAVE YOU MADE ANY PRESENTATIONS BEFORE A PROFESSIONAL MEDICAL GROUP?

WHAT ARE YOUR LONG TERM GOALS? WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN 10 YEARS?

WHY DO YOU WANT TO RELOCATE TO THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY?

WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THIS PROGRAM? WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW ABOUT IT?

WHAT CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE TO OUR PROGRAM?

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR IN A TRAINING PROGRAM?

WHAT FACTORS WOULD LEAD YOU TO RANK A PROGRAM VERY HIGHLY?
QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED

DESCRIPT THE MOST DIFFICULT DECISION YOU HAVE EVER HAD TO MAKE.

DESCRIBE THE MOST DISAPPOINTING CLINICAL EXPERIENCE YOU HAVE HAD SO FAR.

DESCRIBE A DIFFICULT TIME IN YOUR LIFE AND HOW YOU DEALT WITH IT.

DESCRIBE HOW YOU MAKE IMPORTANT DECISIONS.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT YOURSELF FROM PREVIOUS PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES?

WHAT WILL YOU DO IF YOU DON’T MATCH IN (SPECIALTY)?

WHAT OTHER (PROGRAMS / SPECIALTIES) HAVE YOU APPLIED TO?

WHAT DO YOU DO TO COPE WITH STRESS? HANDLE CONFLICT?

WHAT PERSONALITY TRAITS DO YOU FIND IT DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH IN CO-WORKERS?

WHAT KIND OF PATIENT DO YOU FIND IT MOST DIFFICULT TO RELATE TO?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO TO ESTABLISH OPTIMAL RAPPORT WITH SUCH A PATIENT?
Questions you may be asked

What challenges will potentially affect this specialty in the next 10 years?

What do you think of the single Accreditation system?

Is there anything I haven’t asked about yourself that you want me to know?

**Be prepared for anything ...“Unconventional Questions”**

Tell me about your interests outside of medicine.

If you could no longer be a physician, what career would you choose?

If you were an animal, what animal would you be?

If stranded on a deserted island, what would you take with you?

If you woke up in the middle of the night and a spider was dangling in front of you, what would you do?

Describe yourself in three words.

Teach me something.

Tell me a joke. (i.e. “You know you’re a doctor when you shout at the TV during medical shows to correct their pronunciation!”)
MULTIPLE MINI INTERVIEWS (MMI)

- A format that uses several short independent assessments, typically in a “timed circuit”, to assess candidates’ “soft” (non-cognitive) skills.

- Interviewers at “stations” (who have NOT reviewed your application in advance) discuss scenarios focused on **critical thinking, communication, team work and ethical / moral judgment**.

- These interviewers have NOT viewed your file; therefore, they are “unbiased” by your written record. You are represented by your **interviewing skills only**.

- Sample questions can be found on-line. This is one of many examples:

  *Your next patient at a busy clinic is Mrs. Smith, an elderly overweight woman with hypertension whom you have been following for her chest pain. You last saw her 4 weeks ago. On reviewing her chart, you realize that her EKG showed acute ischemia and that you had not seen this result until now. What do you say to Mrs. Jones? Why?*
Questions you may be asked

The Infamous: “What is your biggest weakness?”

Tips for Picking your “Best” Weakness

Don’t pick a weakness that is actually a desirable quality
  “I have no weaknesses.” (not true!)
  “I am too much of a perfectionist.”
  “I work too hard sometimes.”

Be honest BUT don’t mention essential clinical / patient care skills.
Select a weakness that is minor and “fixable” -- one that you have already turned into a strength.
Choose something you can (or have) improve(d) which demonstrates that you are motivated and self-aware. Frame your answer around ‘positives’.

Bottom line:
Show that you are working on your weakness(es) - through concrete steps - because a great physician is always looking for ways to grow and learn!
QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK (OF FACULTY / PROGRAM DIRECTORS)

WHAT CONTACT WILL I HAVE WITH CLINICAL FACULTY?

OF THE FACULTY, WHAT PERCENTAGE ARE CLINICIANS? ACADEMICIANS?

WHAT ARE THE CLINICAL / NON-CLINICAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESIDENTS?

HOW ARE RESIDENTS EVALUATED?

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS PURSUE FELLOWSHIPS UPON GRADUATING?

HOW DO YOUR RESIDENTS DO ON THEIR WRITTEN / ORAL BOARD CERTIFICATIONS?

WHAT FELLOWSHIPS ARE AVAILABLE?

ARE THERE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING?

WHAT ARE THE PROGRAM’S STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES?
WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF ABOUT THIS RESIDENCY?
WHAT MAKES YOUR PROGRAM UNIQUE?
WHAT ARE THIS INSTITUTION’S VALUES?
DO YOU FORESEE ANY CHANGES IN THE PROGRAM IN THE NEXT 3 - 5 YEARS?
**QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK (OF RESIDENTS)**

**How are the attendings to work with?**

**Do residents socialize as a group?**

**What is the daily workload? Work / call schedule? Time off?**

**What types of clinical experiences will I have?**

**What is the patient population?**

**How much autonomy do residents have to manage cases?**

**Are you happy? Was this a good match for you?**

**Do residents get good fellowships upon graduating?**

**Educational benefits – paid conferences? Computer stipends?**

**How are the medical benefits?**

**How affordable is the city? What are the benefits of this community (schools, outdoors, safety, etc.)?**
Even during seemingly casual dinners or lunches, keep proper etiquette and relationships.

Social events are a great way to meet residents but they should be considered interviews. Do not get too informal -- your behavior will be reported to the Program Director.

Although business casual may be appropriate, wear a suit. (Why? “Put your best food forward throughout the process!”)

Unless specifically invited to do so, do not bring a spouse or significant other.
**COMMON MISTAKES**

**INADEQUATE PREPARATION**
(Not reviewing program literature in advance and being unable to respond to questions about information included on your application).

**INCONSISTENT / INSINCERE ANSWERS.**

**INAPPROPRIATE HUMOR.**

**DISPARAGING REMARKS ABOUT PEOPLE, PROGRAMS OR OTHER SPECIALTIES.**

**CHECKING YOUR PHONE / TEXTING**

**APPEARING:**
Discouraged / Rigid / Flustered
Disinterested / Bored
Condescending / Rude
Overly confident or cocky
CRITERIA - PROGRAM SELECTION

PROFESSIONAL
CURRENT RESIDENTS:
DO THEY SEEM happy? SUPPORTIVE of one another? WHAT IS THE ‘SPIRIT’ OF THE PROGRAM?
WHAT IS THEIR BOARD pass rate?
WHAT DO RESIDENTS DO AT THE COMPLETION OF TRAINING - FELLOWSHIPS AND/OR JOB placement?

PROGRAM / PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
ACCREDITATION status / REPUTATION.
TYPE (ACADEMIC OR COMMUNITY) / QUALITY AND SIZE.
WHAT IS THE ROTATION SCHEDULE AND CALL SCHEDULE LIKE?

WILL THE PROGRAM SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL GROWTH? ARE THERE SUFFICIENT MENTORS FOR RESIDENTS?
LOOK AT THE WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF ROUNDS, CONFERENCES AND TEACHING SESSIONS.
COMMITMENT OF DIRECTOR TO THE RESIDENCY PROGRAM? COMMITMENT TO OSTEOPATHIC principles?

CLINICAL RESPONSIBILITIES:
WHAT IS THE RESIDENTS’ DIRECT PATIENT RESPONSIBILITY?
NUMBER AND MIX OF PATIENTS SEEN BY RESIDENTS?

OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING:
WHAT IS THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF RESEARCH?

PERSONAL
LOCATION / HOUSING / COST OF LIVING / OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILY MEMBERS
AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Write down your immediate impressions of the interview and how it compares to other programs for which you have already interviewed. Take notes so you remember each interview! Assigning a score to each program from your list of needs / wants can be helpful.

Sending “thank you” notes is proper Etiquette and a powerful way of showing courtesy and professionalism -- all of which are personality characteristics sought in a strong candidate.

Write a note to all those who participated in your interview process including residents who took you for dinner and/or who led your hospital tour. The note should be brief -- “short and sweet” is appropriate!

• Reference the date on which your interview took place
• Thank the interviewer for his / her time
• Mention specifics from your interview
• Discuss what you liked about the program
• Reaffirm your interest

Ask the program coordinator if the program prefers thank you notes via email or regular mail. While most programs do not mind either, some may prefer one or the other. Whichever method you use, send your notes as soon as possible following your interview!
Below is a sample to give you a basic idea of what to include. Ensure that your notes(s) are uniquely-tailored to your interview(s)!

Date

Dear Dr. (Last Name):  

It was a pleasure meeting with you on (DATE). I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your time and to once again express my sincere interest in your residency program.

Your program has all the components of an excellent residency; a diverse patient population, a variety of cases, hands-on-training, state-of-the-art facilities, fellowship opportunities and residents who are team players. Most of all, I was impressed with the dedication of the attending staff to providing a breadth of experience and their sincere interest in guiding residents to reach future goals.

If you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I trust that during our discussion I was able to convey my desire to become a highly motivated and successful resident.

Sincerely,

Your Name
Review of Key Strategies

Demonstrate RESEARCH
(do your “homework”)
the program / hospital

Explain by EXAMPLE

Ask QUESTIONS

Express ENTHUSIASM
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ADVICE FROM RESIDENTS ON WHAT TO ASK DURING THE RESIDENT INTERVIEW:
HTTPS://WWW.AAMC.ORG/DOWNLOAD/77936/DATA/RESIDENCYQUESTIONS.PDF

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON MAKING THE MOST OF THE RESIDENCY INTERVIEW:

2014 NRMP PROGRAM DIRECTORS SURVEY:

AMA HAS ADDITIONAL PUBLICATIONS ON THE RESIDENCY PROCESS.
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