

INTRODUCTION TO THE FELLOWSHIP GUIDE

We are very excited that you are beginning to take the steps towards a sub-specialty career! As a program, we are dedicated to your success. As successful graduates of this program, you are our greatest ambassadors and recruiters that will bring the next generation of outstanding house staff to the University of Colorado.

This guide was created to combine the expertise of the program directorate and the experiences of your colleagues into a concise document that will help to make you as competitive of a candidate as you can be. The fellowship application and interviewing experience can be confusing and stressful. This guide is just one piece of greater programmatic changes that we hope will provide clarity and minimize the stress associated with applying and interviewing for fellowship. The fellowship guide provides a longitudinal step-by-step description of the application process, obtaining and preparing for interviews, and the post-interview period leading up to your match day.

Please know that Dr. Connors and your associate program directors (specifically your sub-specialty APDs- Lisa Davis, Brian Graham, and Mark Kearns) are here to support you and advocate for you throughout this process. Please do not hesitate to contact us with questions, concern, and needs. Many thanks are owed to prior authors of this guide, including: Suzanne Brandenburg; Brian Graham and the associate program directors; Nicole Canterbury and Jennifer Weber in the House staff office; and your colleagues whose insights and quotes are contained in the document. As you progress through the fellowship experience, I would welcome your feedback so that we can continue to update and improve this document for future University of Colorado residents applying for fellowship.

Please note, we are annotating timelines as if the resident is applying in his/her PGY2 year, to start the fellowship at the completion of the PGY3 year (with no gap year). If this is not accurate to your situation, please adjust accordingly. Additionally, we have attempted to include the most up-to-date sites in this document, but please be aware that this may not always occur due to changes in the process, and the applicant is responsible for his or her application and the timeliness of it.

Lisa Davis, Mark Kearns, and Brian Graham

Essential Tools for Fellowship Applicants:

<https://students-residents.aamc.org/training-residency-fellowship/applying-fellowships-eras/tools-fellowship-applicants/>

- MyERAS Fellowship User guide has the answers to most of your questions
- Timeline for ERAS Fellowship Applicants
- ERAS Fellowship Applicant Checklist
- MyERAS Worksheet
- FAQ

FELLOWSHIP TIMELINE

Table 1: Fellowship Application Timeline Overview

| Task | Timetable | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------|------|-------------------------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|--------------|--|
| | PGY1 | PGY1 | PGY2, 1 st half | PGY2 Jan- May | PGY2 June | PGY3 Jul | PGY3 Aug- Nov | PGY3 Dec | PGY4 July | |
| Explore | █ | | | | | | | | | |
| Research, produce abstracts, publications | █ | | | █ | | | | | | |
| Make contacts | █ | | | | | | | | | |
| Prepare application, ask LORs | | | | █ | | | | | | |
| Register and upload | | | | | | July 10 | | | | |
| Interviews | | | | | | | █ | | | |
| Match Day | | | | | | | | Nov 28 | | |
| Fellowship begins | | | | | | | | | █ | |

PGY1, early PGY2: Research, explore, and make contacts:

- Explore possibilities for fellowship! You realistically need to identify which field you want to apply to by the end of your PGY1 year, to apply to fellowship such that you will start immediately after your PGY3 year.
- Get involved with research! You can find prospective mentors and research projects by talking with your APD and looking on the Heartbeat website at the mentors and subspecialty contacts.
- Participate in a longitudinal subspecialty clinic starting in your PGY2 year (typically January of PGY2)
- Make contact with potential letter writers. Some individuals will offer to write you a letter upon completion of clinical time with you, others you should approach. (See below). Please be gracious, write down details of your shared time with these

individuals, so that you can remind your letter writer of these details when you officially ask for a letter of recommendation. Additionally, if you have a good rapport, you can discuss the future letter with the writer close to your contact time with them and they can write the letter then and it will be fresh in their minds.

January-May, PGY2: Begin to prepare application

- Update Curriculum Vitae (CV) and develop a list of career goals/5-10 year plan that you can share with potential letter writers
- Write a personal statement
- You should let your APD know what faculty you are approaching for LORs, and you can ask them for suggestions. Arrange meetings/email with potential letter writers for your application (request LOR at least 3 months prior to due date, so generally **NO LATER THAN APRIL 1** so that they can be uploaded no later than July 10). Your letter writers may want a copy of your CV and personal statement, so you should have drafts of these ready in advance.
- Review prospective fellowship program websites to determine whether programs utilize the ERAS application and NRMP/SMS and if not, determine their application process and timeline (NOTE: use of ERAS application does not equal participation in NRMP)
 - <https://services.aamc.org/eras/erasstats/par/index.cfm>
- Arrange a meeting with the local fellowship director and/or division head to discuss your application, and potential programs you should be applying to.
- If you have a research mentor, or other mentors in the field, you should discuss your application with them as well—they can give you feedback and discuss what programs you should apply to.

May-June, PGY2: Register and upload:

- https://aamc-orange.global.ssl.fastly.net/production/media/filer_public/66/21/66217fba-8f81-4188-9162-8b180816aecf/eras_2018_-_myeras_fellowship_user_guide_web.pdf
 1. Confirm that you have an active AAMC account
 2. Begin working on your application off-line
 - https://aamc-orange.global.ssl.fastly.net/production/media/filer_public/bd/4e/bd4e14bb-cf45-4f53-986f-7545f5c5adc0/eras_2018_worksheet.pdf
 3. Purchase a valid ERAS token from the current season from the ERAS Fellowship Document Office (EFDO) (**June 6**) <https://www.erasfellowshipdocuments.org/>
 4. Register for ERAS (June 6) <https://apps.aamc.org/myeras-web>
 5. Contact your medical school to upload medical school transcripts and Medical Student Performance Evaluation (yes, I'm serious; some programs actually want this!) <https://www.erasfellowshipdocuments.org/Instructions/DocumentSubmission/MIDUS>
 6. Provide each letter writer with an individual Letter Request Form.
 - **Letter Request Forms should not be duplicated and distributed to multiple LoR Authors. They are customized for each letter and contain a unique Letter ID that can only be used once.**
 7. Complete, submit and upload your MyERAS application, personal statement, and photo.
 - **Goal to complete entire application should be JULY 6, at the very latest JULY 14. Applications will be released to July cycle fellowships on July 15; all**

applications sent between July 6 & July 14 will be date stamped July 15 on the program's side.

8. Confirm that your letters of recommendation have been uploaded (July 10)
9. **Checklist; be compulsive. It is important that your application be complete by July 14 so that the entire application may be downloaded on July 15:** https://aamc-orange.global.ssl.fastly.net/production/media/filer_public/39/85/3985b3f2-7a02-4414-917c-75d8dd918544/2018_fellowship_process_checklist.pdf
10. Register for the Match (NRMP/SMS) (**August 29, 2018**)
 - <http://www.nrmp.org/applicant-registration/>
 - <http://www.nrmp.org/fellowships/medical-specialties-matching-program/>
 - http://www.nrmp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Registering_for_SMS_Match-App.pdf

The schedule from Medical Subspecialty Fellowships' point of view:

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| July 15 | Fellowship applications released to Fellowship programs |
| August 31 12PM, EST | Match opens |
| August- early November | Interviews |
| October 3, 12PM EST | Rank order opens |
| November 14, 9PM EST | Rank order list deadline |
| November 28 | Match Day! |

Cost to applicants (approximate, subject to change):

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| ERAS token | \$115 |
| ERAS fee for first 10 programs | \$115 |
| ERAS fee per program, 11-20 | \$12 |
| ERAS fee per program, 21-30 | \$15 |
| ERAS fee per program, 31 or more | \$26 |
| USMLE transcript fee | \$80 |
| NRMP/SMS match fee | \$80 |
| Flights | ?? |
| Hotels | ?? |
| Recent photograph | ?? |

THE APPLICATION

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION-Getting your best letter

Most programs require 4 letters of recommendation with 1 letter coming from your residency program director. When weighing who should write your other letters of recommendation, you need to determine who could write you the strongest letter.

- **Program Director—REQUIRED.** It is important to notify Nicole Goodwin in the Housestaff office **ASAP (no later than May 1!!)** to arrange this letter. Be sure to include your sub-specialty field that you are applying to when you contact her. This counts as 1 of your 4 letters of recommendation.
- **Research mentor**—If you performed significant research during residency (provided that your experience was positive), it is standard to have your mentor write a letter of support. Absence of a letter from a research mentor will likely be perceived as a red flag.
- Generally, 2 additional letters from faculty in your field of interest, considerations include:
 - Division head or senior faculty with national/international presence
 - Subspecialty faculty with whom you have substantial exposure (longitudinal specialty clinic?)
 - Faculty outside of your area of interest who could uniquely describe your skills

When making these decisions, it is best to consider who could write you the strongest letter. It is appropriate to ask specifically when you meet, “Would you be able to write me a strong letter of recommendation by **June 1?**” Keep in mind that an enthusiastic letter from someone that knows you and can accurately reflect your skills and potential to a program may ultimately carry more weight than a brief form letter from a more esteemed faculty that doesn’t know you.

You are strongly encouraged to discuss your potential letter writers with the subspecialty fellowship director, Dr. Connors, and one of the subspecialty APDs (Lisa Davis, Brian Graham, and Mark Kearns).

These individuals can provide insight into which writers have a track record of writing strong letters of recommendation or more importantly those who may provide less than stellar letters.

Approaching a letter writer

If possible, try to arrange a brief in-person or phone meeting to ask your potential letter writer if they could write a strong letter on your behalf by June 1. By having an actual interaction, you can discuss your career goals, solicit their input on programs, etc. This discussion can: 1) give them a better picture of who you are and where you are going, which they can convey in your letter of recommendation and 2) provide you guidance regarding potential programs. At the time of the meeting, it is also advisable to provide them with a *copy of your curriculum vitae, a statement of your career goals, a draft of your personal statement, and a descriptive summary of any research experience.* These elements allow a skilled letter writer to help you tell your story to your potential programs.

“make sure and get your letter writers/all of your application stuff in early, so you can apply on the first day available, I feel like it helps out being in the initial wave of applicants”

It is best to request letters of recommendation at least three months prior to your deadline (i.e. by April 1). Academic physicians have a number of obligations and responsibilities that will take priority over your letter of recommendation. By giving your letter writer appropriate lead-time; they will be able to draft the best possible letter. It is best to have all of your letters uploaded in by July 10 so that your

application is complete when it can be released on July 15. **THIS IS IMPORTANT FOR PROGRAMS THAT FILL QUICKLY.**

NOTE: All letters of recommendation must be uploaded electronically. This link will give specifics regarding the letters that are acceptable for the process (https://www.aamc.org/services/eras/282520/lor_portal.html), You will need to use ERAS to generate a Letter Request Form that includes instructions for the Letter of Recommendation Portal for your letter authors. This will also generate a unique identifier for each Letter of Recommendation to be submitted. Letter writers can also forward their letters to Nicole Goodwin in the Program Office to assist.

PROGRAM SELECTION

Where: This is an integrative process that incorporates a number of personal, professional, and program-specific factors. Some common considerations include:

Personal

- Geography
- Family considerations (proximity to family, spousal/partner employment options)
- Quality of your application

Professional

- Program focus (Clinically focused, Academic/research training, clinician-educator pathway)
- Clinical experience (unique patient populations, procedural exposure, etc.)
- Sub-specialty focus
- Potential mentorship
- Competitiveness of the field that you are applying to

How many: This is also a highly personal decision which requires you to consider the factors above along with questions including, but not limited to: How competitive is my application? How competitive is my desired sub-specialty? Am I willing to live in (insert undesirable location here) for fellowship so that I can become a cardiologist/gastroenterologist next year? In an informal poll of our exiting residents who matched in their specialty, the average number of programs applied to was 10 and the number of interviews was 6. In competitive fields like cardiology and GI, the rate of interviews is closer to 30%, so residents may want to apply to 20 or even more programs. A discussion with the fellowship director of your specialty of choice and research associate program director can be illuminating with regards to these issues.

How do I choose: Finding the information to help you address the issues above can be challenging. A good starting point is to visit the programs' websites. Depending on the program, the website can provide a wealth of information regarding the current fellows and faculty and their academic interests and accomplishments. Unfortunately, division and fellowship program website updates are often low on the divisional priority list. This can make it difficult to get a clear vision of the nature of the program. Interacting with current fellows and networking with faculty mentors in your field of interest at the University of Colorado can provide a wealth of information on specific programs and create connections at other institutions. For every specialty, it can be valuable to contact the Division Head and fellowship program director at UCDenver and set up a meeting to discuss your interest. These meetings can provide valuable feedback that can strengthen your application and direct you towards programs that fit your interests and career goals. Furthermore, their feedback and, if appropriate, their advocacy, could potentially improve your chances at outside programs. We have also compiled a list of recent graduates of the University of Colorado Internal Medicine Residency Program and their fellowship locations that you could utilize to establish contacts at other programs.

“I found it hard to get information about the programs. It is one thing to read their websites but it's another to get a sense of what kind of program it is before applying. I got my best information from the fellows here and younger attendings. I think it's important to have someone that you can talk to about the type of program you are looking for that can give you helpful guidance on where to apply. I didn't realize going in how important that would be.”

ERAS

As you begin to prepare your application, familiarize yourself with ERAS My Fellowship User Guide and the ERAS Fellowship Applicant Checklist included in the Essential Tools portion of this document. These documents provide a step-by-step description of the critical elements necessary to complete and submit applications to your programs of interest. **Attention to detail is critical.**

“I had not submitted a few parts of my application and was concerned I hadn't heard back from a few programs after a month or longer. Then my wife had me submit my ERAS picture and a couple other documents that were kind of separated on the application website - then the rest of the offers came.”

Resident responsibilities on MyERAS include:

- Complete and submit your MyERAS application and personal statement(s) using MyERAS
- Request USMLE and/or COMLEX-USA-USA transcripts
- Direct letter of request forms to LoR authors
- Upload photograph
- Request Med Student Performance Evaluation and Medical School Transcript
- Apply to programs and assign letters of recommendation
- Track documents and monitor the Message Center for information from fellowship programs and the EFDO, as well as important notices from ERAS.
- Return to MyERAS to update your Profile, request updated USMLE and/or COMLEX-USA scores, and make changes to program selections and assignments as needed.
- Pay all fees as invoiced

PERSONAL STATEMENT

The application and interview process is an opportunity for you to draft your narrative. Through the application and interviewing process, you are telling the story of who you are, what you have done, and how that has informed who you are going to be. Your goal is to demonstrate to your programs of interest that you would fit well in their culture and they could help you to meet your ultimate career goals. The personal statement represents an opportunity to tell that story. Given the highly subjective nature of the personal statement, it is difficult to provide universal advice with the exception of: *It is important to work on your personal statement early in the application process to allow you to have trusted mentors and APDs provide critical/constructive feedback prior to submission.* This becomes even more essential if you are considering a “non-traditional” approach to the personal statement.

“I did feel like several of the interviewers only looked in one section for info. Thus, I felt like it would have been a good thing to list some things twice so that "major items" would not be missed on quick look-throughs”

What the Personal Statement can do for you

- Share experiences that describe what makes you unique as a physician
- Highlight experiences or skills that may not adequately reflected in your CV
- Highlight major items from your CV (see quote above)
- Explain any lapses in training, red flags in your CV, etc. (It is best to address these outright.)

What the Personal Statement can do for your program

- Understand your goals to determine whether you fit with their program
- Assist an interviewer in preparing targeted questions/ "breaking the ice" for your interview
- Identify red flag issues
 - Poor spelling and grammar could suggest a lack of attention to detail
 - Excessive ego, building yourself up by describing inadequacies of others, etc. may demonstrate lack of professionalism or potential personality issues
 - Do not refer to yourself in the third person. Please.
- Your personal statement can hurt you more than help you: make safe choices when deciding what to discuss.

Special considerations regarding the personal statement

Some applicants will write multiple personal statements or edit their primary personal statement to include program specific details. Do this with great caution and consideration. If you are considering this approach, I would encourage you to review it with your mentor and be very cautious with file names to avoid an inadvertent misdirected personal statement (ie sending your love letter to MGH to UCSF).

RESEARCH/SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY

Fellow applicants who have experience in research and an interest in pursuing an academic research career are highly sought after by fellowship programs. For traditional academic programs dedicated to training physician scientists, this section of your application may be the first part of your application that they review. As such, adequate time and attention to accurately reflect your research experiences is important. Even if you are pursuing a more clinical program, documentation of research experience and/or scholarly activity demonstrates a work ethic/level of initiative that the program would value.

- All prior research experience should be listed under Research Experience. Even if your responsibilities felt somewhat menial, keep in mind that running Western gels provided you with "exposure to key bench techniques."
- For each research experience provide a brief 1-2 sentence summary of your responsibilities and what you gained from each experience
- If you worked in a research lab as a summer position during college or medical school this should be listed under Research Experience, not Employment History.
- If you have participated in the Research pathway during your residency, you can list this as special additional education under Research Experience

MEDICAL STUDENT PERFORMANCE EVALUATION(MSPE)/MEDICAL SCHOOL TRANSCRIPT

You are also responsible for obtaining a copy of your MSPE and medical school transcript to be uploaded to the ERAS Fellowship Documents Office (EFDO). There are two mechanisms in which this can happen.

- 1) Medical Institution Document Upload Service- A service that allows medical schools to directly upload your MSPE and transcript to the EFDO. In order for a medical institution to upload a document on your behalf using MIDUS, you must send an electronic request to the medical

institution using EFDO On-line Services via MyERAS. Visit <https://erasfellowshipdocuments.org/Instructions/DocumentSubmission/MIDUS> for complete instructions.

OR

- 2) Your school of graduation may choose to release your MSPE(s) or medical school transcripts directly to you and you will have to scan and upload. Please contact your medical school directly to determine their policies on this matter.

PHOTOGRAPH

This should be a recent photograph that will allow an interviewer to recognize new you when they look up from your application. Dress should be somewhere between a business suit to clinic appropriate professional attire. If you desire a professional portrait, you can contact the University of Colorado Media department and inquire regarding professional photographs.

<http://www.ucdenver.edu/about/departments/mediaproductions/Pages/Contact.aspx>

A professional headshot is not necessary, but it is advisable that the picture appears intended for the purpose of a professional application (ie avoid cropping your picture out of the “let’s be funny” groomsmen picture at your wedding that we all saw on Facebook).

Supplementary Applications

Rarely programs you have applied to will request some additional application form, submitted directly to the program, with a request for payment to process your application. This is of questionable ethics, and you are recommended to report these requests to your APD or program leadership ASAP.

THE MATCH

The match is managed by the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) similar to when you matched into residency. However, you will now be utilizing the Medical Specialties Matching Program (MSMP), if appropriate. This is the third expenditure of your money required for this process:

<http://www.nrmp.org/fellowships/medical-specialties-matching-program/>

The following specialties now participate in the NRMP/MSMP :

- Allergy/Immuno
- Cardiology
- Endocrine
- Gastroenterology
- Geriatrics
- Hematology, Heme/Onc, Medical Oncology
- Infectious disease
- Nephrology
- Pulmonary
- Pulm/CCM
- Rheumatology
- Hospice/Palliative Care

Note: Presence on this list **does not** indicate that all programs in these specialties participate in the match. The NRMP requires that 75% of the overall programs in a specialty and 75% of total fellowship positions in that specialty be included in the match for that specialty to participate. This could result in one of the following possibilities:

- Your program of interest is not involved in the match and may have a unique application process, OR
- A percentage of positions at your program of interest could be filled outside of the NRMP/SMS match

THE INTERVIEW

ARRANGING THE INTERVIEW

Interview dates range from late-August to early November with a majority falling in September and October. According to recent feedback from our most recent group of matched residents, a majority of programs that offered them an interview offered 3-5 interview dates with selected programs only offering one interview date. The programs with limited dates were often more competitive or smaller programs with fewer fellowship spots to fill. This is yet another important reason to get your application in early. Many programs will send an early initial wave of interview offers. By being part of that early wave, you are 1) more likely to get an offer and 2) more likely to have flexibility in scheduling dates.

Scheduling information:

- **Travel during electives for fellowship:** you may miss up to 10 days total during elective time (across all electives and OBMT—see below) without any penalty for fellowship-related travel/interviewing. This is in addition to your annual vacation and educational leave days.
Note: To get credit for any elective, you have to attend a minimum of 50% of the scheduled days
- **You may miss time on OBMT without having to make it up for fellowship-related travel:** If you need to travel for a fellowship interview, you may do so on OBMT with a 2-week notice and by working with the Chief Medical Resident at the VA. Days missed on OBMT *do count* toward your 10 ‘free’ days for interviews.
- You *are allowed* to move your ER shifts around as permitted by the ER schedule, their leadership, you co-residents schedules. However, you must complete a full complement of ER shifts over the month to get credit for the rotation – you can’t “make up” missed ER shifts in any other capacity.
- **Weekend days no longer have to be “counted” as days missed at work:** If you travel for a fellowship interview on a weekend that you were otherwise not scheduled to work, you do not owe the program any time or make-up activities.
- **Half days count as full days:** if you attend an AM clinic and then fly to a fellowship interview in the afternoon, that will count as a full day worked.
- It is recommended that you schedule interviews during elective rotations rather than clinic weeks
 - If scheduling during a clinic week is unavoidable, let your Clinic Director know immediately and confirm that they can cancel/adjust your clinic
- If you are going to exceed the 10 “free” interview days, you need to make an appointment to meet with Dr. Connors who will help you critically appraise where you are interviewing and arrange extra days as needed
 - You may also use your 7 educational days for interview travel, but this would be above the 10 “free” days and requires a discussion with Dr. Connors

Program Notification

The program office enthusiastically supports your career plan to pursue fellowship, and in addition to serving as your advocate, the office will work with you to support your efforts to attend interviews. The following notification requirements exist to ensure that all patient care activities are safely covered in

advance. If you are having any problem arranging time off for an interview, please talk to the CMR at your site to solicit their assistance.

- **Elective/selective absence-** Notify Nicole Goodwin (Housestaff office), Rotation coordinator, affected attending, and Chief Medical Resident at that site
- **Clinic week absence-** Requires prior approval from Clinic Director and notification of Nicole Goodwin (Housestaff office)
- **Early notification-** *You are required to notify Nicole Goodwin in the House staff office as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours after accepting an interview*

THE INTERVIEW DAY

Preparation

“I think the biggest advice I would give is just to research the program extensively. This seems obvious but every school that I interviewed at wanted to know: why them and who I would want to work with if I went there?”

“I would also say, especially if applying somewhat broadly like myself, make sure you have a reason to tell people why you want to go to a certain program since you might be showing up several states away at a place you have no connections to.”

Take time to review your CV, personal statement, and ERAS application before your interviews. Be prepared to talk about anything that you put in your application. Consider the focus of the program that you are visiting. If the program is focused on developing NIH funded investigators, a majority of your interactions will likely focus on research: what have you done, what do you want to do, what opportunities exist, etc. The residency program, under the direction of Brian Graham and Lisa Davis, also offers mock interviews prior to the start of interview season to aid in your preparation.

If you are interested in a specific area, you are welcome (and encouraged) to request specific faculty to interview with at the time of your visit.

Special considerations: Talking the research talk

If you are interested in pursuing a career as a funded investigator, it is important that you understand a handful of terms and concepts. Keep in mind that the NIH is not the only funding source (ie VA, foundation grants, etc.) but knowledge/understanding of these terms will set you apart from many of your peers.

“I was asked “What is an appropriate amount of clinical time versus research time to adequately pursue a research career?” I had been prepped on this by Brian Graham 25% (clinical) versus 75% (research) is what I said, but other applicants I was with totally failed that question – the question was intended to see if you were serious about academics and had thought ahead.”

NIH Alphabet Soup

Loan Repayment Program (LRP): NIH program in which awardees will receive repayment of 25 percent of your repayable debt, up to a maximum of \$35,000 per year. Requires a two-year commitment to at least 50% research time.

Ruth L. Kirchstein National Research Service Award Individual Training Grant (F32, also called NRSA): NIH sponsored *individual* fellowship grant. The NRSA is a competitive award that pays an annual stipend to

your institution, which allows them to protect your research time. The NRSA is both a CV builder but more important can serve as your introduction to the NIH pathway to success (NRSA->K->R) Ruth L. Kirchstein National Research Service Award Institutional Training Grant (**T32**): NIH sponsored *institutional* training grant. The T32 provides money to your institution to provide salary support to allow protected time for fellow research training at institutions with a proven track record of developing independently research funded academic physicians (NOTE: The University of Colorado Pulmonary Division has the largest T32 in the country). It is a legitimate and appropriate question to ask how many T32 spots a program has, and how fellows are selected to be on (i.e., be supported by) the T32.

K grant (K08-basic, K23-patient-oriented/clinical research): Mentored career development award that provides financial support to your institution to support your early research career. The K grant requires candidate/institution to commit to a minimum of 75% of your professional time to research. Presence of K funded investigators in a program is one indicator of a successful research training program as well as institutional support for career development of junior faculty. Application for K grant can occur in late fellowship or early junior faculty years.

R grant (R01): The holy grail. The R01 is one of the penultimate measures of success in investigational research. Everyone gets paid. David Schwartz will know you well.

The interview

The interview day can be highly variable with our recently matched residents reporting from 4-13 interviews during the day. While most fellowship interviews are 1 to 1 interviews, some fellowships utilize a group interview structure with 2-4 faculty members interacting with you.

“The biggest surprise was the number of interviews -at UCH, where I happen to already know several of the faculty, I had 13-30 minute interviews.”

“When interviewing for residency, 2-20 minute interviews. For fellowship, I had 8-45 minute interviews at one place, multiple faculty members interviewing me at the same time, and just overall more in depth and intense. Stamina was key...”

“I was surprised by the number of interviewers who had actually read my file beforehand. Most knew about what research I had done and were interested in it. They wanted to talk who they knew at UCD, etc. How their program could help me succeed and what person I might be interested in working with.”

Questions that our residents were asked during interviews

- What is your 5-10 year plan?
- How do you resolve conflict/Tell me about a conflict that you have resolved?
- Give me an example of constructive criticism that you have received
- *“What is an appropriate amount of clinical time versus research time to adequately pursue a research career?”*
- What is an example of adversity that you have overcome?
- What are you passionate about outside of medicine?
- Who would you want to work with at our program?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Post-interview communication

- Program to applicant- As they are preparing their program match lists, programs may often contact fellow applicants to assess their level of interest. This can vary from “We really like you and hope that you come here” to “Where are we on your rank list?” This can be a challenging interaction. If you can be completely honest, politely do so (ie “I have you ranked number 1 and really hope to match there” or “I am not planning to rank your program”). For all situations in between, avoid burning any bridges. One trick is you can use your significant other as a foil for these types of questions (“I *really* loved your program, but I’m still trying to convince my SO to move to XYZ.”) There is no rule against you volunteering information. If you really want to go to a program, you can say you will rank them #1.

“One thing that I was not prepared for was the amount of pressure I received post interviews to show my cards to programs and what to say. I had 4 calls from program directors asking me “what are you thinking; we are going to rank you to match.” It was awkward. Good problem to have though.”

- Applicant to program- At most programs, there is no longer an expectation for a hand-written thank you note for each individual that you interacted with during your interview date. However, directed communication has the potential to bolster your position on the program’s rank list. The match process is an emotional process not just for applicants but also for programs. For a program director and interview committee, getting their most highly ranked candidates can be construed as a validation of the quality and appeal of their program. Therefore, it is possible that a less competitively ranked individual who has indicated their enthusiasm for a program could slide in front of a more competitively ranked person with comparable talents that did not appear interested. *This statement should not encourage dishonesty regarding your intentions; instead it is intended to demonstrate that it is acceptable and appropriate to reach out to your #1 program and inform them of your interest.*

Taking a position outside of the match- A brief introduction

As stated above, a sub-specialty must have at least 75% of its programs and 75% of the overall number of fellowship spots in the NRMP match to participate. This means that a significant number of positions may exist outside of the match. Remember that participation in ERAS does not mean that the program will utilize the NRMP match. Also remember that a program’s involvement in the NRMP match does not mean that 100% of their spots will be available in the match. There are a number of reasons that programs may choose to hold positions outside of the match:

- Position is reserved for alternate track (ie research track)
- Securing quality candidates in less competitive fields where it is hard to fill
- Remove the “gamble” from the match for the program

Notably, many of these positions are not widely advertised. In some cases, specifically when the out-of-match position is related to a research track, the applicant may be notified in advance to solicit their interest so that their interview day can be appropriately structured. These are sometimes offered with a request for response almost immediately (48 hours).

“I applied through ERAS and when I was offered an interview they asked if I would consider their clinical research track, which is a 4-year program broken up into 2 research and 2 clinical years. They were very clear from the beginning that the research track would be out-of-match. Once I told them I was interested, I was set up to interview for both the categorical and research tracks, which turned into a 2-day whirlwind with 14 interviews. They interviewed for these spots pretty early on. I think my interview day was in early August.”

In one case, an out-of-match position was offered after our resident reached out to the program director to express his sincere interest regarding the program

“It's always awkward deciding how aggressive to be with your top picks (i.e. Do I tell them they are my #1 pick?) I'm not an expert (and maybe I did this wrong) but I told my program that I really wanted to come there on the interview day and later followed up and e-mailed the program director that they were my #1 after I was done with all interviews. (Later on), I received a phone call from him offering me the spot.”

What to do if you are offered an out-of-match position

You are highly encouraged to contact Geoff Connors (PD), Brian Graham (APD), Lisa Davis (APD) or Mark Kearns (APD) ASAP after receiving an appealing out-of-match offer to discuss the offer to ensure that all critical issues have been addressed prior to formally accepting the position.

“If you are offered a spot, make sure it's clear what type of offer it is i.e. Is it a research spot where you are required to do an extra year or two of research?”

“I know this is cliché, but I think being honest about your career goals and interests is the best way to remedy that situation. If your heart doesn't lie in research, then spending all of those years in a research track would be a waste of time and talent and not worth a guaranteed spot. And also keep in mind, if you were offered an out-of-match spot, you would probably be a strong enough applicant to match somewhere else.”

Resources:

- <https://students-residents.aamc.org/training-residency-fellowship/applying-fellowships-eras/tools-fellowship-applicants/>
- <https://erasfellowshipdocuments.org/>
- <https://erasfellowshipdocuments.org/Instructions/DocumentSubmission/MIDUS>
- <http://www.nrmp.org/applying-interviewing-fellowship-programs/>