



Applying to physician residency programs

After deciding which physician specialty to pursue, it is time to prepare and send a residency application and supporting documents to your desired residency programs. The Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS) is used by most residency programs to manage this process.

ERAS is available to all U.S. medical students through their respective dean's offices. For international medical graduates (IMGs), it is available through the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG), which acts as the designated dean's office for foreign students.

Read more from the AMA about going from M4 to PGY-1 in six steps.

Things to know first

Prior to applying, you are responsible for determining whether a program of interest uses ERAS, what the deadline is for submitting an application and the eligibility requirements for that program. Start the process early so you have sufficient time to resolve any problems you may encounter.

Once you have contacted your dean's office, the rest of the application process can be completed online through ERAS. The cost of using ERAS covers your registration and application fees for up to 10 programs in each discipline. Additional costs may be incurred once the initial 10 programs have been exceeded. The fee is calculated automatically and charged directly to the applicant. Remember that once the total fee has been paid, it is not refundable. For IMGs, an additional application fee is required.

When choosing the number of programs you would like to apply to, use a systematic approach that takes all relevant decision-making factors into consideration. If location is significant to your decision, use that factor to narrow down your top- and middle-tier choices.

Here are four things to consider when researching physician residency programs.

Writing personal statements



A personal statement is a written description or essay of your achievements, accomplishments and interest in the educational program or job that you are applying for. It is an important part of your residency application process.

You should write a different personal statement for each physician specialty for which you are applying. Give yourself time to solicit feedback on your statements from advisers and instructors and make suggested revisions. The individuals you select to review your statement should be from various backgrounds, both medical and nonmedical, and should include someone from the specialty to which you are applying.

Your reviewers should be skilled not only in writing but also in providing objective, high-quality and detailed feedback. Your statement should flow smoothly while conveying your reasons for choosing a career in that specialty. Your passion, work ethic, personality and desire to make a positive contribution to the field should be apparent to the reader. Strive to underscore your interest in the specialty by including relevant life experiences, clinical work and research that make your statement stand out and convey your unique qualities.

Check out four great tips for writing a standout personal statement.

Preparing a curriculum vitae

A curriculum vitae (CV) is a chronological overview of accomplishments and is used by professionals in the fields of academia, medicine, teaching and research. You will be asked throughout your career for a copy of your CV, so take the time to prepare a quality document that accurately reflects your achievements.

Requesting recommendation letters

Depending on the specialty and the programs to which you are applying, the request for letters of recommendation can vary slightly. Be sure to consult specific program requirements for letters of recommendation before you seek out individuals to write them on your behalf.

Letters written from attending physicians have more weight in an application than letters from senior residents. However, you should choose individuals who know you well enough to write a strong letter on your behalf and can discuss your specific qualities and experiences rather than writing in generalities. It may be useful to provide them with examples of your accomplishments and skills that they can use as supporting material for the letter. It is also recommended that you provide all letter writers with a copy of your most current CV and personal statement.



Although the required number of letters of recommendation can vary by program, four to six letters is a good starting point. Try to obtain at least one letter from a faculty member on an advanced rotation in the specialty to which you are applying. For those applying to primary care residency programs, in addition to acquiring letters from practicing physicians in that specialty, get letters from faculty members on different specialty rotations that relate to your future scope of practice.

Medical students with pertinent experience outside the traditional clinical arena—such as research, professional society participation or special clinical experiences through volunteer or international work—should also consider professionals from those areas as potential recommendation letter writers. Through ERAS, you can control which letters go to which programs.

Learn more about how to line up great medical school letters of recommendation.

After applying

Once a completed application has been sent, the waiting begins. Typically, you should receive responses regarding interviews within four to six weeks. If you don't, you can contact ERAS using the USMLE/ECFMG identification number assigned to you and inquire about the status of the application.

Learn more about perfecting your application packet with the AMA “Making the Rounds” podcast.