

Positive result expected for residents as match day approaches

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Save for the cheers and tears, the 1998 residency match will end for more than 1200 medical students on Mar. 11. As I sit at my desk a month before the final results are known, I foresee results similar to the 1997 match. There will be a few major disappointments, but most students will be pleased with the final result.

Like last year's graduates, students from the Class of '98 have applied to an average of just more than 13 programs in 2 disciplines — a first choice and backup choice. They have spent an average of \$235 to enter the match, which is run by the Canadian Resident Matching Service (CaRMS).

Graduates usually rank about 10 programs, meaning they will have removed at least 3 programs from their final list. Why do they do this? Did they change their minds after meeting the program directors? Have they become more confident about their chances in the programs that were their first choice?

Whatever the reason, students invariably pare down their lists. At CaRMS we tell them not to second-guess how well an interview went or how well they will be ranked by programs when they rank their choices. Instead, they should concentrate on where their true preferences lie.

This year's match data are similar to last year's in both number of positions and number of students. This year about 1214 students competed for 1192 positions, but those numbers do not tell the whole tale. Forty to 50 of these students will opt to train in the US, where they have also applied for postgraduate training; most of these trainees are graduates of medical schools in Quebec and Ontario.

This flow southward means there will be plenty of residency slots for the Class of '98 and for the handful of graduates from 1997 who entered the 1998 match after delaying their training for various reasons. More than 90% of 1998 graduates should match in the first round and 80% of graduates should match to 1 of their top 3 choices.

Of course, data like these mean little as students anxiously await match-day results. As the deadline for ranking programs in order of choice approaches, tension increases perceptibly. At CaRMS we hear it in the voices of the students who call for advice as they struggle to put all their information together and make the most important decisions of their brief medical careers. The Class of '98 does seem to be a confident and well-informed group, but CaRMS staff did notice a last-minute rush as students scrambled to enter the match as couples.

Usually couples are identified in the fall, but this year there have been several unexpected requests to use this special match. At CaRMS we surmise that spring is in the air and these students have suddenly realized that if they do not match together they could end up living in separate parts of a very large country, with little chance of changing locations for the duration of training.

In the end, match day '98 will be like the many that have preceded it. We will spend most of the day dealing with the few problems involving students who did not get what they hoped for or were unfortunately left unmatched, and in the process we will lose sight of the success the match represents for the vast majority of new graduates. Last year, an undergraduate administrator told me that when match day arrives she does not wait in her office to interview and assist the few unmatched students. Instead, she goes to the auditorium to watch the celebrations of the matched graduates. She said this allows her to keep things in perspective.

Some year, I hope to join her. ☺



Features

Chroniques

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☞ See also Experience (page 631) and Pulse (page 696)