

## “Trials, Tribulations, and Triumphs of Selecting a Resident: A Program Director’s Perspective”

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One of the duties of the Medical Physics Residency Training and Promotion Subcommittee (MPRTP) is to promote residencies by fostering an environment that is both fair and transparent. To provide an insider’s view into the resident selection process, we interviewed several program directors. The answers given below represent a summary of answers that best reflected the information gathered.

Because graduate programs do an excellent job of training graduate students, picking one for a residency position is difficult. Some would argue that the single most important step in training a resident is picking the correct candidates for your offering (i.e., the right “fit”). We offer you the trials, tribulations and triumphs of being a Program Director during the candidate selection season.

### **Q1: What would you consider the best or most enjoyed part of the process?**

- Meeting candidates and hearing about their research and interests in medical physics
- Meeting new people, especially those who are talented and very passionate about getting into the field
- Meeting young energetic physicists
- Interacting with candidates and attending their presentations
- Meeting the candidates and determining which individuals will be a good fit for our program

### **Q2: What is the biggest logistical hurdle you face each year in putting a resident selection process together?**

- Getting faculty to participate (in our department, certain clinics are cancelled during Physician Resident interviews but not for Physics interviews)
- Faculty cancelling at the last minute due to clinic issues
- Candidates often cannot make the interview dates so we accommodate with additional solo interview dates
- Trying to determine the best fit for our group, who will work hard and behave professionally
- Putting significant amount of time and effort into the interview process knowing the results may not turn out well (e.g., we only matched 1 of our 2 positions last year)
- Choosing whom to invite for an onsite interview from a long list of highly qualified candidates

### **Q3: If you could hear the candidate’s inner-voice or be a fly on the wall at the resident dinner, what piece of information would you like most to stumble upon?**

- What is their work ethic? Are they a team player? How will they get along with the team and fit into our department?
- Do they treat the “waiter with respect?” The way they treat people is indicative of how they will work as a member of the team.
- Is their interest in our program genuine?

- Is the candidate looking for a career where they can simply punch the clock or are they genuinely passionate about becoming a clinical physicist?
- Is the candidate truly interested in spending an additional year on research when applying to our hybrid program?

**Q4: Whether it is true, and whether you can do anything about it, what do you think is something the candidates look negatively upon in regards to individual institutions?**

- **Program-related**: cost of living, program location, too big or too small of an institution, environment too stressful/unfriendly, perception that residents are to be used primarily for labor, lack of structure; proportion of residents recruited into our residency from our graduate program
- **Faculty-related**: faculty missing interviews, too few faculty, perceived faculty commitment to residency education, faculty who are difficult to work with, less organized teaching plans from program director presentation, too few research projects
- **Equipment-related**: small variability in equipment/procedure, availability of specific equipment (e.g., MR Linac, protons)

**Q5: Are there specific soft-skills you wish more candidates had or that you give extra credit for?**

- Ownership of their training: recognize and take responsibility for all aspects of their training/education, especially their failures
- Self-driven and able to complete projects
- Strong work ethic
- Professionalism, empathy, responsiveness, integrity
- Polite and respectful
- Organized
- Possess outside interests (e.g., athletics, community service)
- Good communicator, especially with non-physicists (e.g., patients, physicians)
- Potential to become confident leaders who can engage with others in the department

**Q6: Can you share a funny or awkward candidate or staff faux-pas you hope never happens again?**

- **Staff faux pas**: asking illegal questions even after having been advised about this issue; negatively discussing other residents, staff or their program's pet peeves with candidates
- **Candidate faux pas**: Not dressing professionally for an interview; focusing too much on salary; not having any idea about the institution to which they applied; contacting the program to try and get additional information to use in their rank list; slide presentation listing another program's name; expressing an unwillingness to work with a certain group of people (e.g., women); giving a presentation prepared for a meeting without modifying it to fit the longer or shorter interview timeframe; mistaking our Program Director for a resident; leaving mid-interview

**Q7: What is your typical on-site interviewee to position ratio and how did you arrive at that number?**

Number of interviewees	Number of positions	Description
2-4	1	Standard departmental interview process
10	1	Chosen based on past years of ranking/matching results and number of candidates who accept the interview
3	1	Determined before the match; it may be difficult to increase for recruiting hybrid residents because we need to take research into account
7-12	1	To provide a deep enough rank list
10	1	Based on faculty/staff availability, chance of matching, and ability to financially support lodging
10 onsite/15-20 phone	2	To have a large enough pool to fill our spots
25	2	
20 onsite/~30 Skype	2	
20	5-6	Video interviews used to select candidates for onsite interviews; logistically it's too difficult to do any more

**Q8: If there was one thing you wish you could convey to every applicant that would make a portion or the entire process better, what would it be?**

- Relax and enjoy the process and meeting other physicists. Don't focus on the stressful aspects, i.e., competing for the slot.
- Do your homework! Do research on the program and know about the place in which you are interviewing.
- Avoid "interview fatigue!" This ultimately causes candidates to appear disinterested and/or disengaged.
- Be honest about your strengths and weaknesses.
- Only apply to programs that you would be willing to attend.
- We don't take it personally if you don't choose us as we understand everyone must make the best decision for their circumstances.
- Pay attention to details in your application: avoid grammar/spelling mistakes and get recommendation letters from individuals who really know you because generic letters are not useful.
- Study task group reports and know how to integrate them with theory.
- Understand the role of a clinical physicist: "I have noticed that physician resident candidates are much better at knowing their role ...[in] treating cancer patients ..., where[as] some medical physics resident candidates ...just have book knowledge, so they don't seem to really get the gravity of their role as a physicist in patient care.

**Q9: What do you view as the Pros or Cons of concepts like a national interview calendar or coordinating with other loco-regional residencies?**

- **Pros:** applicants can prioritize interview offers and manage interview costs better; evens the playing ground for programs and candidates; forces programs to think about their dates early in the process
- **Cons:** could force candidates to prioritize regions instead of programs; our busy clinical schedule does not permit the flexibility to coordinate our interview dates with other programs; may not be as applicable to programs in smaller cities

**Q10: Have you ever been asked a question during an interview that just left you scratching your head?**

- When describing what the job entails, it became clear that the candidate had no idea about the position to which they had applied.
- During the lunch break we put together for the candidates, one of them asked if we could wrap it up early and get to their interview faster.
- During a video interview, in response to each question the candidate would answer by asking me the same question. The candidate did not receive an onsite interview because they did not answer any question!
- When a candidate cannot think of any question to ask during an interview.

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**Do you know about the latest news regarding the residency selection process?**

SDAMPP is sponsoring a self-reported calendar to share interview dates:

<https://www.sdampp.org/calendar.php>

AAPM Education Council has recently re-affirmed support for the MedPhys Match (MPM):

<https://www.aapm.org/org/committees/ETC/2019.10.11.ltr.to.MP.grad.res.pdf>

We wish programs and candidates a rewarding and faux-pas-free interview season!