Tips on Applying for Vascular Surgery Residency Programs

1. Research on Internet

It is important to start the application process early. Researching the various vascular residency programs is the most time consuming part of the whole application process. A variety of online resources are available to check out the basics of ACGME approved vascular residency programs: AMA's FREIDA web site and ACGME's web site. These web sites help verify the basic characteristics of the program including number of positions, teaching staff, years of future accreditation, affiliated institutions, contact information, etc.

2. Consider Your Personal Situation

No program suits all. Personal aspirations are a very important consideration. Family situation, preferences of spouse or significant other, children etc., maybe other factors which ultimately make or break what you can derive out of the vascular program. Evaluating programs for their endovascular component is important, however a clear eye on making sure that you get enough open vascular experience is just as important.

3. Speak to Your Mentors

Many residency preferences finally are made based on what we learn about the program from people we trust. Mentors play a big role in our choices, directly or indirectly. A frank discussion with your trusted mentor(s) is a very healthy beginning. A constant bidirectional communication with your mentors is likely to help you make the ultimate choice.

4. Interview Process
These days, no one can afford any extra traveling expenses, let alone the time needed to attend a wasteful interview. A thorough scrutiny of programs that offer an interview is necessary before embarking on the actual commitment to interview.

A good idea is to learn more about the program alumni and even speak to them. More than often this opportunity is not taken until after the interview. Members of alumni may give a frank picture of the relative domination of interventional cardiology, vascular surgery and interventional radiology, which is ultimately crucial for the trainee's personal educational gains from the program.

In any case, restricting interviewing to only programs that look like a good future match is recommended. Many programs interview more than one candidate in a day, a few try to do justice by interviewing only one candidate in a day. Interview day is clearly the most important day for fact-finding. However, being well-informed beforehand helps to derive more out of the interview day and eases the candidate into the process.

Keep an eye out for new mentors in the vascular programs. Ask direct questions about common endovascular procedure volumes including carotid stents, abdominal/thoracic endografts, etc.

In today's age, keeping an eye on open vascular experience also is vital by checking the average numbers of open aneurysms, distal bypasses, etc. being performed.

Try spending time with current residents in the vascular programs. They are probably one of the best resources of information. Stay in touch with them even after the interview day.

5. Matching Process

List programs purely based upon your own preferences. There is a common misconception that one needs to rank a program higher if the program is likely to choose the candidate. On the contrary, the matching process is purely the ranking of programs as per one's own preferences.

Questions? Email Dr. Nikam, a member of the Society for Vascular Surgery Young Surgeons Advisory Committee, at sdnikam@geisinger.edu.

Posted June 2010

Article Date: Tuesday, June 1, 2010
Author: Shivprasad Nikam, MD Vascular and Endovascular Surgeon, Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, Wilkes Barre, Pa.
Tags: Trainees, Residents & Students
Article Type: Article