These 5 residents chose emergency medicine—and would do it again

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Emergency physicians—applauded for being on the front lines in the darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic—saw 554 of their field’s 3,010 residency positions unfilled after the 2023 Match this spring.

While burnout has been prevalent in emergency medicine since the pandemic—a trend seen across all specialties—some believe the unfilled residency positions may be due in part to research published in 2021 in the Annals of Emergency Medicine projecting that by 2030 there will be more than 7,800 more emergency physicians in the workforce than needed.

In a joint statement, emergency medicine physician organizations said that with the recent pandemic and results in the last two Matches, it is a challenging time for the specialty. The organizations are working to ensure that medical students fully understand the specialty by proactively showcasing the advantages of emergency medicine careers and addressing negative perceptions.

“We affirm our responsibility and commitment to engage actively,” says the statement from the American College of Emergency Physicians and 10 other organizations. The specialty “continues to attract talented and dedicated students and remains one of the most popular specialties for students.”

Current residents and fellows in emergency medicine say the challenging conditions should not deter medical students and other residency applicants from the field if that is where their passion lies.

“I won't sugarcoat: It is a bit of an unnerving time to be in emergency medicine … [But] if I were to go back, I would choose it again in a heartbeat. There’s truly nothing else like emergency medicine,” said Anna Heffron, MD, PhD, a first-year resident at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York.

Dr. Heffron, an alternate delegate for the AMA Resident and Fellow Section (AMA-RFS) shadowed an emergency physician before starting medical school and volunteered in the emergency department, feeling, she said, “oddly very at home.”
She loved trauma surgery, the intensive care unit (ICU) and pediatrics during medical school and during her fourth year of medical school realized that “everything I loved about the other specialties coalesced in emergency medicine and coincided there with my research, policy and advocacy interests.”

She’s looking forward to helping shape the future of emergency medicine.

**Don’t let negative reports stop you**

Elisa Quince, DO, had a strong sense she wanted to specialize in emergency medicine by the end of her third year of medical school and knew for sure by the beginning of her fourth year. She loved the patient population, the variety of procedures a physician is able to do and the fact it is a unique and exciting field.

Now a first-year emergency medicine resident at Kaweah Health in Visalia, California, Dr. Quince said she loves being there for her patients during tough times and encourages medical students to not be shy about following their passion in emergency medicine.

“If you love emergency medicine and if it’s something you want to do, don’t be afraid to pursue it. I wouldn’t overly listen to the negativity about job shortages and scope creep. Emergency medicine is an ever-evolving field with a lot of options,” Dr. Quince said.

Angela Wu, MD, MPH, a third-year emergency medicine resident at George Washington University School of Medicine & Health Sciences, encourages students who may be feeling dissuaded from joining the field to talk to people with different perspectives about the challenges and benefits of the specialty.

“There is work to do, but emergency medicine isn’t going anywhere. I personally find fulfillment in it every day and could not imagine choosing a different specialty,” said Dr. Wu, who is a delegate for the AMA-RFS and on the board of directors of the Emergency Medicine Resident Association.

Dr. Wu’s passion for public health initially drew her to the field. She stayed for the sense of belonging she felt as part of the emergency medicine team and because she felt like she was making a difference as “the safety net for any and all patients.”

**Ask for different perspectives**
Anna Yap, MD, said it is important for those interested in pursuing emergency medicine to talk with emergency physicians they know and to do rotations in emergency medicine to get a feel for the field.

“If you still like it, then do it. There are good jobs, just not as flexible in location as there was in the past,” said Dr. Yap, who serves as speaker of the AMA-RFS Governing Council and is a University of California, Los Angeles Health Equity and Administrative Fellow and a clinical instructor in emergency medicine.

“The recent papers about the job market and the concerns about the private equity takeover of emergency medicine are things to consider, but do not let them dissuade you from doing emergency medicine if you really do like the medicine,” Dr. Yap said.

Dr. Yap trained to be an emergency medical technician before medical school and suspected that emergency medicine would be a good fit for her. She believes she thrives under pressure and enjoys “the wide breadth of medicine” that emergency medicine physicians practice. The flexible shift work also allows her to pursue interests such as health policy.

Moudi Hubeishy, MD, started his residency training in family medicine before switching to emergency medicine. He’s now a resident at Franciscan Health in Olympia Fields, Illinois. The COVID-19 pandemic meant he was spending much of his family medicine residency time in the ICU where he discovered he “enjoyed working with critically ill patients and with a multitude of different patient populations from all different walks of life.”

“Take the chance. You won’t know until you try it,” said Dr. Hubeishy, the vice speaker for the AMA-RFS Governing Council. “Emergency medicine is the best job in the world. we get to serve as the first line physicians for patients and perform a multitude of procedures.”