Your checklist for success in your third year of med school

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After two years of lectures, labs and exams, plunging into the third year of medical school is an exciting time. You’ll treat patients for the first time and don that white coat you’ve wanted to wear for so long. But even as you transition from the classroom to clinic, you’ll still have to balance time-sensitive tasks to successfully apply for residency. Here are the important ones to remember—all arranged in an easy checklist for you to keep.

Third-year rotations, preparing for residency

Congratulations, you’ve survived an intense transition to medical school, gross anatomy and countless exams to arrive at the year you’ve been studying for—the one where you’ll finally test your book knowledge through real-world experience. As a third-year student, you’ll spend fewer hours studying and far more observing physicians in clinical settings.

Expect seismic shifts in your day-to-day experiences as you learn how to communicate with patients, partner with care teams and navigate the idiosyncrasies of a hospital. Every six to eight weeks, you’ll explore a different clinical rotation, typically set in a core group of specialties: pediatrics, surgery, internal medicine, family medicine, obstetrics-gynecology and psychiatry. By the end of the year, this exposure to different fields should help you choose your specialty and know which away rotations you’d like to rank before beginning your fourth year of training.

Your schedule will feel more structured compared to that of your early years in med school. It’s not uncommon for third-year students to juggle clinical rotations, courses, shelf exams and residency requirements simultaneously. Considering this, it goes without saying that being a third-year student requires meticulous focus, resiliency and careful management of priorities. That’s why we’ve helped organized the major ones for you. During your third year, you’ll want to make sure you:

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/medical-students/medical-school-life/your-checklist-success-your-third-year-med-school
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Find residency programs that fit your specialty interests and needs

Start your program search by accessing FREIDA Online®—the Fellowship and Residency Electronic Interactive Database—which features listings for nearly 9,800 medical residency and fellowship programs. Students using FREIDA can find information about training programs, key application deadlines, and specialty training statistics, which provide a helpful overview of residency programs based on trends across all programs in a specialty. Make the most of your search using these resources:

- 4 tricks to a successful residency program search, which features FREIDA-friendly search tips and keywords.
- FREIDA’s FAQs and registration page.

Organize the key elements of your application

Take time to arrange supporting documents that will make your residency application shine. Working on these materials early will help you stand out from the crowd and arrange a more personalized application. As you organize your application materials, be sure to:

- Prepare your CV and personal statement.
- Identify authors for your letters of recommendation. Select people who can speak highly about your clinical experiences and personality.
- Connect with mentors for residency application and interview advice. If you need help finding a physician in your desired specialty, you can explore networking opportunities through these specialty societies or email AMA Membership for information on connecting with physicians.

Schedule your United States Medical Licensing Exam Step 2 exams

Now that you’ve completed Step 1 of the USMLE, it’s time to gear up for Step 2 exams on clinical knowledge (CK) and clinical skills (CS). The Step 2 CK and CS exams aim “to assesses whether you can apply medical knowledge, skills and understanding of clinical science essential for the provision of patient care under supervision and includes emphasis on health promotion and disease prevention,”
according to the USMLE’s official site.

Get ahead in your preparations using these helpful guides:

- Check out an overview of the Step 2 CK and Step 2 CS exams, which break down essential information on the exam structure, format of test questions and the clinical content they cover.
- Access the USMLE’s official practice materials page, featuring exam tutorials, sample study questions and videos for both exams.
- Take advantage of Kaplan Medical offerings, including in-person and online events featuring information on USMLE Step 2 and other USMLE-related topics. AMA members receive 30 percent off Kaplan Medical’s Step 2 CK High Yield and Qbank courses.

Familiarize yourself with the Electronic Residency Application Service

April and May are the months you’ll want to look out for. Generally, that’s when the Association of American Medical Colleges’ Electronic Residency Application Service opens. During this time, mark your calendar and set reminders for important program deadlines, especially since the ERAS doesn’t monitor individual application deadlines for you. You’ll have to research them and check that you’re submitting your materials on time.

As you delve further into your application, be sure to:

- Confirm that your programs of interest actually participate in ERAS.
- Contact programs of interest for application deadlines.
- Continue to narrow down programs of interest using FREIDA Online.
- Start preparing the application materials you’ll need for MyERAS, the online website where students complete their application, select residency programs to apply to and assign documents for the residency programs to receive. Read these FAQs about getting started, the MyERAs application and documents you’ll need for the ERAS 2016 season.

Build your clinical and research skills

Third-year rotations offer a chance to broaden your clinical skills and combine your newfound medical knowledge with potential research opportunities. From clinical work with patients to getting published in student journals, stay plugged into any opportunities that will allow you to build your CV around your
specialty. Here are a couple resources to get you started:

- Check out the 4 reasons to build your CV at the AMA Research Symposium. This year’s deadline for abstract submissions was Aug. 19. Keep this timeframe in mind for participating next year.
- Attend the AMA’s clinical skills workshop, which offers hands-on instruction for students on essential medical skills such as airway management, blood pressure checks, ultrasounds and suturing. The event will be hosted at the 2015 AMA Interim Meeting in Atlanta, Nov. 12-14. For future updates on the workshop and meeting information, follow the AMA’s medical student meeting page.

**More go-to tips for med school success:** Students beginning their first and second years of training can read and print this checklist of the top tasks to prioritize. Also stay tuned to *AMA Wire* for an additional post covering the key insights you’ll need to succeed as a fourth-year student transitioning to residency.