

## Study examines what it costs to interview for medical residency programs

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You hear it all the time: Lodging and transportation for residency program interviews are expensive. But exactly how much are your peers spending on them? A national survey of more than 1,000 fourth-year medical students provides insights, including how much students spend on residency program interviews based on their desired specialties.



# Residency interview costs by specialty

## Anesthesiology



## Emergency medicine



## Family medicine



## A national perspective on applying to residency

“Our study is unique in that we describe the number of interviews and the costs associated with the interviews or with completing an away elective and compare those costs by specialty choice,” according to authors of a recent study capturing the various activities graduating medical students prioritize as they apply for residency. The study, which was published in *Academic Medicine* in October, used a sample size of 1,376 students from 20 schools.

With such a large sample, study authors were able to examine the influence of career specialty choice, residency program preparation and other factors on the activities of graduating medical students. They also tallied the total number of residency programs students applied to based on specialty and collected data on how residency applications impacted students financially. Residency program interviews and electives were a major part of this analysis.

## How much do students pay for residency program interviews?

Based on survey data, the majority of students reported spending \$1,000-\$5,000 to interview for residency programs, according to the study. Yet, while 65.7 percent of students reported expenses within this range, the exact amount of money students spent on interviews varied based on specialty.

For instance, “family medicine applicants spent significantly less than those applying to other primary care specialties,” according to the study. In fact, more than 50 percent of students applying to programs in family medicine only spent \$1,000-\$2,000 on program interviews. See right for a full breakdown of interview costs for students applying to different specialties.

When comparing interview costs, study authors also noted these five key trends among residency program applicants:

| **The average student traveled to 12.3 interviews.** “On average, students applied to a mean of 36.4 residency programs and interviewed at approximately one-third of the programs to which they applied. The overall number of interviews for all specialties was similar except that radiology applicants interviewed at significantly more programs than applicants to any other specialty,” according to the study.

| **Students applying for residencies in “hard-to-obtain” specialties spend more time and money on their applications, which can increase interview costs.** Only 8.6 percent of students spent more than \$7,000 on residency interviews. “However, almost 20 percent of surgery applicants spent more than \$7,000, and surgery applicants spent more than those applying to other specialties,” according to the study. One potential explanation for

this drastic gap in spending: “[Students] applying for residencies perceived to be hard to obtain, such as surgical specialties, were more likely to view the fourth year as a time to maximize the likelihood of matching in their residency of choice,” the study authors noted. “In fact, surgery applicants applied to more residency programs, completed more away or auditions, and spent more money on the interview process than applicants in almost every other specialty.”

**Couples paid more.** For those who participated in the couples match, “the cost to interview was significantly higher” than for those who did not participate as a couple match, according to the study. Only 8.9 percent of students in the survey participated in the couples match. Read how this couple navigated the Match together and their advice for other students applying for residency with a partner.

**Some students view away electives as part of their interview strategy.** Many students felt that pursuing an away elective could help increase their chances of landing an interview in a competitive program or specialty. For instance, in a separate study questionnaire on away electives, 72 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the “primary reason” for choosing an away elective was to obtain an interview for residency, according to the study.

**Students wanted more time for interviews.** “Flexibility remains an important issue for medical students. More than half of the respondents needed more time to interview, and approximately a quarter needed more time to decide on a career specialty,” the study authors noted.

Read the study for additional observations about fourth-year students. The purpose of this study was to learn what graduating medical students considered the primary purposes of the fourth year of medical school, their approach to residency selection, and the challenges they faced in meeting their fourth-year goals.

**Tell us:** If you’ve already applied for residency, how much did you spend on accommodations for your interviews and were there any tips you used to save money? Share your thoughts in the comments below or the AMA’s Medical Student Facebook page.

**Want more tips for applying to residency? Check out these resources**

- | Review this must-have list of questions the Association of American Medical Colleges recommends students ask program directors and residents during their residency program interviews.
- | Get six key tips to help you excel on video interviews for residency.
- | Learn how to write a competitive CV using these six strategic steps.
- | Find out how many residency programs students really apply to each year (broken down by specialty).
- | Check out this essential checklist for fourth-year students featuring key tasks and deadlines to prioritize as you apply for residency.