

4 things to consider when researching medical residency programs

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Before the interviews and applications, a comprehensive search for the right medical residency program begins with research. Here's a look at four factors you should consider when choosing which programs to apply to, and how FREIDA™—a recently revamped AMA tool that offers searchable, sortable data on 11,000-plus residency and fellowship programs accredited by the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education—can help you gather the information you need to find the right match.

Geography

When a medical student picks a specialty, they decide what they want to do. Just as important is determining where they want to do it. A residency is a three- to five-year commitment, on the surface.

But the roots a physician creates during that time frame can extend decades. In fact, roughly half of residents who completed residency training from 2007–2016 are practicing in the state where they did their residency training, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges.

How FREIDA can help: A customizable, interactive map allows applicants to see all the programs available within their desired specialty throughout the country.

Finances

The average yearly salary for a first-year medical resident is about \$52,000 in the United States, according to the recruiting website Glassdoor. How far that number goes will depend on what sort of lifestyle a physician desires, their family obligations and where they plan to live. Consider consulting a cost-of-living calculator.

How FREIDA can help: With detailed salary and benefit information for the majority of residency programs in its database, FREIDA gives applicants a rough idea of their financial outlook as a resident.

Institution type

In addition to its location, the institutions in which physicians practice can be vastly different. As a residency applicant, you have to decide what is right for you. If you enjoyed your clinical experience during medical school, you may want to continue working in an academic or university-affiliated program.

Conversely, if you want to be very hands-on with your patients from day one, a community hospital might be a better fit for you. Community hospitals can be particularly beneficial for residents training in primary care.

How FREIDA can help: Students can narrow their searches by program type and size, and examine the special tracks—such as hospitalist or women’s health—available to residents in each program.

Work-life balance

One in three residents considers work-life balance the biggest challenge they face during their graduate medical education, according to a 2017 survey. In light of that, the ability to have a life outside of the clinic is a motivating factor in both program and specialty choice. It would be a stretch to say many programs offer schedule flexibility, but it is possible to have work hours that don’t entirely prevent time for family and leisure.

How FREIDA can help: The average work-hours filter can give you an idea of just how likely (or unlikely) it is to get your desired schedule. In surgery, for instance, only 25 out of 299 programs that have submitted data have schedules in which first-year residents typically work 60 or fewer hours per week.