Residency interviews: Don’t forget to ask these 7 key questions

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As a physician, the questions you will ask of your patients will go a long way toward determining a
diagnosis. But as a medical student moving into the realm of practice, questions you will ask during
your residency interviews will be a vital part of determining what residency programs are the best fit for
you.

Knowing which questions to ask at your residency interview can make a good impression with the
people who may decide if you are a good fit in the program. It also can give insight on how you fit in.

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) created a list of key questions physicians-in-
training recommend students ask to learn important information about residency programs. They
suggest asking various people, including program administrators and current residents, you meet
during your interviews different questions to gain a holistic picture of the program you’re considering.

Here’s a look at seven questions that medical students should ask during residency interviews.

**Which types of practices and fellowships have past residents
gone into after residency?**

Your future as a physician is far from set in stone, but you probably have a blueprint in mind. You
should understand how each residency program can help you bring that blueprint to life.

Learn about the three residency-interview questions M4s should be prepared to answer.

**What formal and informal learning opportunities can I expect?**
You should leave your interview with a good handle on how often there are didactic lessons, the format in which they occur and the topics they cover. You also should understand the scope of the inpatient educational opportunities—which training sites you are likely to work in and what types of patients you are likely to work with.

**Does the general volume of clinical work support a balance between service and education?**

Evidence suggests that residents spend up to 35 percent of their time in activities having marginal or no educational value, including paperwork that comes in addition to patient progress notes, patient transport and acquisition of laboratory results. Understanding what you will be doing and how you can grow from it is key.

Find out more about what not to do during your interactions with program directors.

**What are the basic resident benefits?**

Your compensation package during residency will include more than salary. Understanding some of the specifics—the amount of paid time off and sick time, retirement account match, stipends for conferences—will give you a better handle on your long- and short-term financial picture. Get tips to help fourth-year medical students manage virtual interviews.

**What are a program’s strengths and weaknesses?**

This is a great question to ask current residents. Understanding where a program will serve you well and its short-comings, then matching those strengths and weaknesses with your own can give you an idea of how you will develop in that program.

Check out this helpful list of the things you should know before residency interviews.

**What activities are residents involved in outside the program?**

A recent survey of more than 1,900 graduate medical education trainees across 29 specialties found that residents named work-life balance as their top challenge. Asking this question can offer a glimpse...
of what your life could be like outside of work. To further understand your work-life balance, you also want to get a handle on duty hours and how much paperwork physicians are doing on their own time.

How do residents in the program get along?

You'll have the chance to ask this question and observe it when you interact with the team during your visit. Once in residency, your fellow residents might not be as close to you as your peers were during medical school, but for many trainees they can be an important support system.

Read the full AAMC list (PDF) of questions.

The AMA Road to Residency series helps medical students, international medical graduates and others find their best residency match. Find articles and resources to help you ace your residency interview, put together your rank-order list, and more. The AMA is here to help you advance to the next step of your medical career.