

M4s: Make the most of your post-Match time in medical school

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For many medical students, Match Day marks the end of a rigorous academic journey before another begins. Often, medical school graduation and some much-needed downtime are in the near future. That will be especially welcome after two-plus unprecedented years as medical students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While some medical students have already completed their coursework by Match Day, many others have a month or more remaining in medical school.

Holly Caretta-Weyer, MD, is associate program director at Stanford's emergency medicine residency program. She cautioned against falling into senioritis after you match.

"A lot of times people match and they completely check out," she said. "Getting some perspective and respecting the transition is really important. It's a huge change and you may not realize that until you are actually in it."

How can you gain that perspective and prepare for that transition? Dr. Caretta-Weyer offered these tips.

Consider the skills you need immediately

Many medical schools are offering transition to residency programs and boot camps. The transition to residency is also a major focus of the AMA Reimagining Residency initiative, a grant program that aims to transform residency to meet the workforce needs of America's current and future health care system.

If your medical school does offer a boot camp or specialty-specific preparation courses, Dr. Caretta-Weyer recommended students take advantage of those opportunities. In addition to that, she said

students need to think about the things they will be expected to do without supervision early on in residency and hone those skills.

What medical students transitioning to residency should “be thinking about is how to recognize sick patients and do basic life-support tasks,” she said. “What I often will tell students is if you haven’t done any sort of training in scenarios where there are more potentially unstable patients, you should. Whether that’s in a clinical or simulation setting, it will prepare you for the things you are going to do in residency.”

Learn more with the AMA about the five skills residency program directors expect on day one.

Get a view of where you stand

To get an accurate assessment of your skills, Dr. Caretta-Weyer recommended an outside perspective, ideally from a faculty member with whom you have worked closely.

“If you have someone who advised you through the undergraduate medical education process or if you have someone in your specialty who knows your ability and is willing to give you an honest picture of your performance, take advantage of that,” said Dr. Caretta-Weyer, who is working on a project to develop a unified system of assessment across emergency medicine residency programs as part of the AMA Reimagining Residency initiative.

“The key questions in getting feedback are can you give me an honest 30,000-foot view of my performance? And would you be willing to meet regularly to talk about this? Any reasonable faculty who is interested in the development of students would be really into that.”

Read about what one attending physician sees as keys to your success as a resident.

Pursue other medical interests

One beneficial area to brush up on, Dr. Caretta-Weyer said, is your teaching skills; residents add the task of teaching medical students to their new responsibilities. That could mean working as a teaching assistant or even taking an elective on teaching.

“A lot of people are interested in other things, education, administration, quality improvement, social medicine,” Dr. Caretta-Weyer said. “There are so many things out there that students don’t have time to explore, so take some of that idle time to expand some of your skill set.”

Find out what six top doctors say you need to know during your residency.

Relax

Anyone entering residency needs to make sure to come in with a fresh body and mind.

“I tell all of our incoming residents to take a vacation and spend time with their family and friends,” Dr. Caretta-Weyer said. “Medical school is hard. Residency is harder. We like it when residents come in rested. As an intern, you are spending a lot of time off service and doing things outside of your specialty you don’t chose. So that recharge is important.”

Learn more with the AMA about how medical residents can make the best use of their time off.