

How social media can aid medical residency program searches

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Most of today's medical students were brought up in the age of digital technology. For those applying to residency programs in 2021 that may be of some comfort. Yet for most, finding the right residency program will present unique challenges.

In addition to the powerful tools in FREIDA™, social media platforms, which most students have used for entertainment rather than research, education and networking, can be a valuable resource, one physician believes.

“So much of the process for residency applications is picking where you want to apply and, as you move forward, thinking about how you want to rank programs,” said Liz Southworth, a first-year ob-gyn resident at Michigan Medicine “A lot of it is people talking about the feel of a program. That is something that is hard to assess if you are unable to get there and meet people. So, students should look at how social media can serve a role in understanding a residency program.”

Dr. Southworth is the former co-chair of the Committee on Medical Education for the AMA's Medical Student Section. She offers a few best practices for students looking to use social media as a tool to find the right residency program.

Keep it professional

Even when applying to medical school, prospective students are often advised to look at their social media presence and perform a scrub of past content that may appear unprofessional. As you begin your career, you'll want to start clean, by creating a professional account.

“Applicants need to have accounts themselves and think through what a professional social media account looks like. This is a great professional platform. Some things to think about doing are to utilize a professional photo, use your full name as it appears on your applications.”

In terms of what you post to your professional social media, Dr. Southworth advises students to ask themselves a question: Would you be comfortable discussing that topic in an interview?

Show your work

Your application portfolio will include mentions of research experience and service work—ideally through your own CV as well as your letters of recommendation. A social media account offers a chance to reinforce that.

“Use it as a platform to highlight things that are important to you—whether it’s research you’ve done or community service work,” Dr. Southworth said. “A lot of applicants in this cycle, their opportunities to present at national conferences have been disrupted. Some events have been canceled and some have become virtual.”

Avoid overanalyzing

Social media does offer networking benefits. You can get on the radar of key decision-makers through it. Still, Dr. Southworth cautions against reading too much into those interactions.

“Don’t put too much stock in a program liking what you say or following you back,” She said. “That doesn’t necessarily mean you are going to get an interview there or be ranked highly. I’d use it as information gathering and not put too much stock in those other aspects of social media.”

Dr. Southworth also advises students to stick to the traditional communication channels if they have questions pertaining to their application and interview status; the person running a program’s social media account may not be working on resident selection.

The bottom line

Social media can help in both information gathering and relationship building. Still, in researching this topic, Dr. Southworth has found that many programs lack Twitter and Facebook pages. Considering that, it’s just one tool in an applicant’s arsenal.

“We are in the infancy of learning how these platforms may serve a role in this process,” she said. “For applicants, [when a program has a social media presence] you can access a lot of information in one place rather than having to go to multiple websites. If you are interested in a program and want to take a deeper dive it makes sense to still use the classic channels of communication, which means visiting a program’s website, seeing who the contact person is and posing questions through email.”

For one-stop shoppers

No online resource contains as much information as FREIDA, the AMA’s comprehensive residency and fellowship database, includes more than 12,000 Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education-accredited residency programs, and it offers a streamlined user experience.

The platform has been recently revamped to offer any user who has signed in the ability to personalize searches and nickname them so that search filters don’t need to be reapplied every time. AMA members also have the ability to take notes on programs, conduct side-by-side program comparisons, and use FREIDA’s Residency Calculator to help plan ahead for residency application expenses.