

2021 Match hits record highs despite pandemic's disruptions

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What's the news: Despite the uncertainty inflicted on the American health system by the pandemic, the 2021 Main Residency Match saw a 2.7% rise in the number of first-year residency positions offered compared with the 2020 Match that took place amid the early spread of COVID-19 in the United States.

The National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) reported that the 2021 Match was largest in its history, with 38,106 total positions offered.

A record-high 5,915 programs took part in this year's Match, 88 more than 2020. In five years, the number of Match-participating programs has risen by 845 (16.7%), spurred in part by the completion of the transition to the single graduate medical education accreditation system for allopathic and osteopathic programs.

Why it's important: Program fill rates rose across the board, even amid the insecurity across the health care sector and big changes during the residency application process such as virtual interviews and disrupted clinical rotations and testing.

Of the 35,194 first-year positions available, 95% were filled, a 2.9% increase over last year. There were 1,927 unfilled positions after the matching algorithm was processed, a 3.6% drop compared with 2020.

The number of applicants who registered for the 2021 Main Residency Match reached an all-time high of 48,700, an 8.3% rise over 2020 and the largest single-year bump in recorded history. In turn, a record-high 42,508 applicants submitted rank lists, a 6% increase over 2020.

Some other nuggets from this year's Match:

- 92.8% of U.S. MD seniors matched to postgraduate-year one (PGY-1) positions, a drop from 93.7% in 2020.

89.1% of U.S. DO seniors matched, which fell from 90.7% in 2020.

54.8% of non-U.S. citizen international medical graduates (IMGs) matched, a drop from 61.1% in 2020.

According to an NRMP statement, “the unavailability of medical licensure examinations in the early stages of the pandemic coupled with permanent changes to the scoring and administration of those examinations by the end of 2020 created significant challenges for IMGs this year and likely contributed to the decline.”

Find out how the AMA International Medical Graduates Section advocates on the issues that affect IMG physicians.

The NRMP added that “changes in clinical rotations may have affected match rates.” This year, 1,892 positions were offered during Match Week through the Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program (SOAP). Those results will be available in the full Match report published in early May, the NRMP said.

Learn more: If you’re among those who matched this year, the AMA offers great advice and resources on the next steps to get ready for your transition to residency.

Find out the AMA Resident and Fellow Section gives voice to, and advocates for, the issues that affect resident and fellow physicians.