

Match numbers up, but more slots needed to meet doctor shortage

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At the conclusion of this year's Match, which took place last week, 5.6 percent of U.S. allopathic medical school seniors were not placed into first-year residency programs, while more than one-half of applicants who already graduated from these schools did not match. At the same time, match rates rose modestly for all major applicant groups.

More than 40,000 people registered for this year's Match, but only 34,270 were active applicants, fewer than last year's all-time high of 34,355 active applicants, according to preliminary data. Overall, 75 percent of active applicants were matched into first-year positions. Of the 17,373 active U.S. allopathic medical school seniors, 16,399 matched in first-year programs, about 94.4 percent.

The 2014 Match offered 29,671 first- and second-year positions, 500 more than last year and an all-time high. More than one-half of these additional positions were in the primary care specialties of internal medicine and family medicine.

While the rate of students and graduates from osteopathic medical schools who matched did increase from last year, 22.3 percent of applicants from this group still were not matched into a first-year program. In addition, 52 percent of previous graduates of allopathic medical schools did not match. About one-half of students and graduates of international medical schools, both U.S. citizen and non-U.S. citizen, did not match either.

Meanwhile, the number of U.S. seniors participating in the Match declined this year—113 fewer seniors submitted their rank order list of programs, which medical education experts find surprising.

Internal medicine filled 99.1 percent of open positions and increased the number of available spots by nearly 250. Family medicine added 72 more slots and filled 95.8 percent of its positions. Pediatrics saw 24 more openings this year, filling 99.5 percent of positions.

While the increase in primary care positions is a step in the right direction, it is unlikely to alleviate the

projected physician shortage. Workforce experts predict that the United States will face a shortage of 130,000 physicians across all specialties by 2025.

In the months leading up to the Match, concerned students prepared for the residency bottleneck and higher odds of not being able to match by applying and interviewing at more programs than students have in previous years. The 2014 Match ended up being slightly less competitive than recent years because of fewer applicants and more positions, but many students still did not place into a residency program.

“While the AMA is pleased to see an increase in the number of U.S. medical students matched into residency programs this year over previous years, a significant number of students were still left without residencies,” AMA President Ardis Dee Hoven, MD, said. “The AMA will continue to work with Congress on a balanced approach to expand the number of residency slots to produce an appropriately sized and geographically distributed physician workforce.”

Medical school class sizes continue to rise in response to the projected physician shortage—without a proportional increase in the number of residency slots. Potential cuts to graduate medical education (GME) funding would only exacerbate the problem. The AMA’s Save GME campaign calls on Congress to preserve funding for residency training.