IMG residency-applicant interviews: Follow these do’s and don’ts

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International medical graduates (IMGs) applying to residency programs in the U.S. face longer odds than their counterparts from U.S.-based DO- and MD-granting medical schools. In 2021, about 55% of applicants from international medical schools matched—59.5% for US citizens and 54.8% for foreign nationals.

More than a decade ago, AMA member Kamalika Roy, MD, made the journey from India to continue her medical training in the U.S. as an IMG. She went through the Match process twice. After not landing a residency position on her first attempt, she worked as a research assistant in the interim.

“Staying in the country, understanding the network, understanding the system, it actually improved my interview and the chances next time,” said Dr. Roy, assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Washington School of Medicine and chair of the AMA International Medical Graduates Section (AMA-IMGS) Governing Council. The AMA-IMGS is comprised of more than 40,000 IMG physicians and represents the interests of physicians who have obtained their medical school education outside the United States.

This week marks the AMA’s IMG Recognition Week, an annual event celebrating the contributions international medical graduates make to medicine. The AMA’s IMG Physician Toolkit helps IMGs navigate the process of practicing medicine in the U.S.

With residency interviews underway, Dr. Roy offered these tips for IMGs.

Don’t be something you’re not
When an interview question arises that gives you pause, don’t give the answer you think an interviewer is looking for. Instead, be yourself.

“During an interview, it’s very important to stay genuine,” she said. “It’s better not to try to cram answers, or say something that you read somewhere. It’s always good to be genuine, and give the answer that comes to your mind and that actually describes you as a person—because the people who are interviewing you, they are pretty smart. They have been doing this every year, but with hundreds of doctors.”

Check out these four tips to help IMGs succeed with the Match.

**Do bring up the visa subject**

If you are a non-U.S. citizen IMG, programs are aware of your visa status going into an interview. Still, Dr. Roy says, it doesn’t hurt to broach the topic.

“It’s always advisable to ask that question directly, just to remind that person that you still need the visa sponsorship and how would that process be dealt with,” she said. “Generally, the program director will be able to answer the question by themselves or direct you to the person who would be able to address it.”

Read the top questions to ask before you submit your residency application.

**Do take time to practice**

From Dr. Roy’s experience, practice made for a more seamless interview process the second time around.

“I did practice with my own answers,” she said. “And I practiced doing interview questions with a couple of colleagues before booking for the interviews.”

**Don’t be afraid to ask for help**

She also found that working with people on interview prep and in a clinical setting created more stakeholders in her success.
“All of these experiences came up during the interview process and my mentors, my teachers who I had worked with doing that almost an eight-month period [between the two matches], they actually reached out to the programs,” she said. “They were contacting program directors asking if the program director needed any other information, supporting my interview or supporting my application.”

Learn more with the AMA about how IMGs have changed the face of American medicine.