

# Match rank-order list: One intern reflects on the do's and don'ts

FEB 1, 2022

## Brendan Murphy

Senior News Writer

---

The path to putting together a successful rank-order list appears tricky. Who better to guide fourth-year medical students and other residency applicants on the journey than one who has recently created one?

Oluwabukola “Bukky” Akingbola, DO, MS, is an ob-gyn intern at the University of Minnesota. Read on to learn about some of her tips for current residency applicants.

And as you finalize your rank-order list, don't forget to consult FREIDA™, the AMA's comprehensive residency and fellowship database, which includes more than 12,000 Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)-accredited residency programs and offers a streamlined user experience.

## Understand your bandwidth

Dr. Akingbola, an AMA member, was fortunate to match at Minnesota, her top choice, which allowed her to pursue many of her non-clinical goals. Looking at some of her other top choices, that may not have been the case, in retrospect. One example of this, she says, is that she wanted to match with an academically strong residency program, but she also wanted to be able to follow her academic pursuits.

“I knew I wanted to go to an academic program, but what I'm coming to find is most important is making sure that learning time or academic time is protected. And when I look back at programs I interviewed at and ranked after my number 1, that was not necessarily the case at those programs,” Dr. Akingbola said. “That would have been tough for me to navigate. When I think of the overall fit of program, that maybe wouldn't have been the best fit for me.”

## Don't overrate required numbers

Many physician specialties, including obstetrics and gynecology, are going to have a required number of procedures or hours spent on certain services. Going into the formulation of her rank-order list, Dr. Akingbola said, that may have been a misplaced point of emphasis because patient volume at most urban facilities allows for residents to hit those numbers.

"I put a lot of emphasis on going to a program where I would meet my surgical numbers or my ACGME-required numbers," she said. "I'm now coming to find that, at least at all the programs that [I] interviewed with, that was unlikely to be an issue. I would also recommend putting less emphasis on choosing one program over another because of salary differences. Usually they are well adjusted to the cost of living for the area."

Learn about the numbers behind the record-setting 2021 Match cycle.

## Rank your first choice first

In Dr. Akingbola's view, if a program thought enough of you as an applicant to interview you, then you are certainly in the running.

"One of my mentees interviewed at a program that she wasn't sure she could match at. I told her just put it number one, if it's your top choice," she said. "Some people get wrapped up in the 'I don't know if they want me as much as I want them' mentality. They liked you enough to give you an interview. Unless you botched the interview with everyone you interacted with, if you are confident the program is your number one, put it number one."

"There is a lot of fear in this process," Dr. Akingbola said. "You have to trust yourself and trust that you are making the best decision for yourself."

Learn with the AMA about tips to help fight rank-list uncertainty.

## Try not to overthink it

Considering the very article you are reading, this piece of advice may seem impossible to fully heed. Dr. Akingbola spoke with many physicians, peers and faculty members and even watched videos about strategically creating a rank-order list. In the end, however, she just went with what felt right.

“Try not to stress out too much,” she said. “It is much easier said than done. The hard part truly was getting the interviews and getting through them. With ranking, you should just go with your gut. Try not to overanalyze every piece of it.

“I personally recommend: Go with your first picks. I put my rank-order list [in ERAS] and submitted it. Don’t change anything last minute. Whatever the thoughts you had when you made that original list probably ring truest.”