Waiting on Match Day? Ease your mind with this expert advice

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You’ve submitted applications, done all your interviews and—with the March 2 deadline to submit rank-order list coming and going—you have completed the last official step of the residency-selection process. What’s next for residency applicants? A 16-day wait for Match Day.

The two weeks between the rank-order list deadline and Match Day may seem like an eternity for medical students waiting to hear about the next phase of their career. Chantal Young, PhD, is director of medical student well-being at the Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California (USC), a member school of the AMA Accelerating Change in Medical Education Consortium. She offered these insights on how students can productively approach that time.

Understand that anxiety is natural

Residency selection can be a stressful event. It is OK if its culmination induces a measure of anxiety.

“There is nothing wrong with them for being anxious,” Young said. “The situation is just inherently anxiety-producing. So the one thing I really don’t want students to do is to be anxious and then beat themselves up for being anxious. A much better way to be with your anxiety is to embrace it, even to love it as representing a deep longing for a good future and a good life.

“Anxiety is just trying to ensure your safety and happiness,” she added. “But I would encourage students not to fully buy into their anxious thinking—to question their worst-case scenario thoughts.”

Learn how the 2021 Match hit record highs despite pandemic disruptions.
Make the most of your freedom

As Match Day approaches, most medical students have light course loads. This period of relative free time is some of the last that most residency applicants will have before entering a very busy residency schedule. And even before residency begins, there will be the work of planning to relocate your life. Enjoy the time.

“I try to help students sit with their fears—of failing, of disappointing other people, of feeling shame for not getting what they wanted, and to redirect those fears and use that energy to do something,” Young said. “Start a journal, start a fitness routine, go out and socialize, explore. This is a time where there’s actually nothing to do, so go out and enjoy your life.”

Find out which factors students weigh most when picking residency programs.

Get out of the medical school bubble

It’s probably hard not to obsess about such a milestone event, but getting out the medical school bubble will help, Young said.

“Spend time with others, activities and locations outside of medicine. This helps us remember there is a world out there,” she said.

When you are around classmates, Young advised that you ask them not to discuss Match-related issues. “Organize a hike or an outing for your classmates. It feels good to be inclusive and supportive, rather than competitive.”

Remember the hidden gems

You might not match with one of your top choices, and—even after all the worry—that might work out better than you think. “We encourage them to be open to all potential matches and to discover the hidden possibilities and gems that each match might have to offer,” Young said.

“We are all doing our best to create a happy life with a meaningful career,” she added. “You are so much more than your Match Day outcome.”