Are you in tune with a residency program? Get a new way to check

SEP 2, 2022

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A tool from the AMA gives some residency applicants a new way to make values and career priorities a part of their residency-selection process.

The Alignment Check Index (ACI) is a pilot program that allows ob-gyn residency applicants to compare their experiences and characteristics to the domains that residency programs consider in their own assessment of their program’s values and interests.

The program is a feature of FREIDA™, the AMA Residency and Fellowship Database®, which includes more than 12,000 Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education-accredited residency programs and offers a streamlined user experience. The platform offers any user who has signed in the ability to personalize searches and nickname them so that search filters don’t need to be reapplied every time. AMA members also have the ability to take notes on programs, conduct side-by-side program comparisons, and use FREIDA’s Residency Calculator to help plan ahead for residency-application expenses.

“The current tools that are available give some metrics on students who have previously matched in these programs, such as what their USMLE scores were or how many research publications they had,” said Maya Hammoud, MD, MBA, associate chair of education and chief of the Division of Women’s Health at the University of Michigan Medical School. “What this tool does is it adds another dimension, which is what is the mission and the goals of the program and how does that align with the mission and the goals of the applicant.”

How it works

The ACI creates an alignment index applicants can use in helping them determine where to apply.
The tool begins with a self-assessment, in which ob-gyn residency applicants reflect on their experiences as they prepare to apply for residency. They will self-assess and assign point values in six categories: academic metrics; work experience; community service and advocacy; research experience; teaching experience; and background and lived experiences. Upon completing the assessment, students are given an alignment index and list of programs to determine those most aligned with their characteristics and experiences.

On the program side, ob-gyn residency programs assign a percentage of emphasis in each category, adding up to a total of 100%. For example, a program with a heavy emphasis on research and less teaching might weight research experience 40% and teaching experience 5%. Medical students who have engaged in a high level of research will have a higher alignment score with those programs.

While FREIDA’s features capture important factors such as geography, child care availability, program type and size, salary and more, the ACI is another complementary tool for finding a residency. It also aims to change the mindset of applicants from simply targeting what are perceived as the best programs to those most aligned with their interests, values and experiences.

“What this looks like, ideally, is students applying to programs where they feel that their values align with the program and where the program is going to be able to support their growth the most because it’s an important area to the program,” said Dr. Hammoud, who also is a consultant to the AMA on medical education matters. Here is what to know about this this year’s physician residency-selection cycle.

How to use it

For the 2022–2023 residency-application cycle, applicants may begin submitting applications Sept. 7 through the Electronic Residency Application Services (ERAS). Programs do not view those applications until Sept. 28. Ahead of submitting applications, the ACI may allow ob-gyn applicants to view how they fit with a program’s points of emphasis. About three-quarters of residency programs in the specialty are participating.

Alignment Index numbers given by the ACI allow medical students and other residency applicants to determine which programs are most suitable for them. It also can be helpful for program signaling—a system that allows applicants to indicate interest in a limited number of residency programs. If a residency program is one that has a higher alignment score for a student, that would be an ideal opportunity to express increased interest with a program signal.

“The best way to look at it is similar to a dating app,” Dr. Hammoud said. “Programs enter what they are looking for—and applicants self-assess. Like a dating app, both parties are very interested in
having the highest alignment, because otherwise it's a waste of time to go on a date.”

Learn with the AMA about tips to help M4s manage the stresses of virtual residency interviews.