

'Match Day' Competition Toughest in the Surgical Fields

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Competition among medical school seniors for first-year residency slots was toughest for positions in neurological surgery, orthopedic surgery, otolaryngology, plastic surgery, and radiation-oncology, the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) has announced.

At Match Day ceremonies last Friday, students learned where they will train for the next 3 to 7 years. Some 16,399 US allopathic medical school seniors were among the 25,687 applicants who successfully matched to first-year residency positions. The Match offered 29,761 first- and second-year positions, 500 more than in 2013 and an all-time high. The 2014 numbers continue a steady trend of position growth, NRMP executive director Mona M. Signer said in a statement. "In the past 5 years alone, we've seen an increase of more than 4,000 positions, and more than half of those are in internal and family medicine."

While the total number of registrants increased in 2014, the number of US seniors declined. Eighty-nine fewer seniors registered for the Match and 113 fewer submitted rank order lists of programs.

"That's a surprise," Signer told *Medscape Medical News*, "but it has happened before. I'd contacted 27 medical schools that had at least 10 fewer applicants than the previous year. Some had candidates in dual programs such as a PhD or a masters, some students had academic issues and others were delayed for a variety of reasons. I don't see this as a trend but a one-year blip."

The number of US seniors choosing primary care continued to increase modestly, with 3167 seniors matching in internal medicine and 1398 in family medicine. An additional 1818 seniors matched in pediatrics, 19 fewer than last year.

This year's Match included 40,394 registrants, 59 more than last year. However, 85 fewer applicants submitted rank order lists of programs. With more positions and fewer applicants competing for them, match rates rose for all key applicant groups, NRMP said in the statement.

The overall match rate for first-year positions was 75%, the highest since 2006. The match rate for US seniors was 94.4%, 0.7 percentage points higher than last year. Of the applicants who matched, 54% of US seniors and almost 50% of all other applicants matched to their first choice for training.

There were increases in the number of primary care programs and positions offered in the Match. Internal medicine programs offered 6524 positions, 247 more than in 2013; 99.1% of positions filled, and 48.5% filled with US seniors. Family medicine programs offered 3109 positions, 72 more than in 2013; 95.8% of positions filled, and 45% filled with US seniors. Pediatrics programs offered 2640 positions, 24 more than last year; 99.5% of positions filled, and almost 70% filled with US seniors.

"While the number of US medical students choosing internal medicine residencies continues in an upward trend, the exorbitant cost of medical education with the resulting financial burden on medical students and residents along with problematic payment models and administrative hassles are barriers to a career in general internal medicine and primary care," Patrick Alguire, MD, senior vice president for medical education, American College of Physicians (ACP), said in a press release.

The great majority of current internal medicine residents will ultimately enter a subspecialty, such as cardiology or gastroenterology. Only about 20% to 25% of internal medicine residents eventually choose to specialize in general internal medicine, compared with 54% in 1998, according to ACP.