

March 2022

Career Advising Corner

COMSEP Career Advising Collaborative

Hello again COMSEP members! We're back with another installment of the Career Advising Corner. Many advisors are in the process of meeting with rising M4's who have decided on a career in pediatrics and are now, naturally, full of excellent questions about how to decide what might be the "right" residency program for them..

In this issue of the Career Advising Corner, we will cover some helpful information around advising students seeking information about diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice in both residency programs and in the climate of the associated pediatric department. This information will hopefully prove helpful in working with students: (1) at the start of their residency application process, (2) a useful resource for planning questions on interview day and finally, (3) as a reference students may want following their interview day and in making their rank list.

We are grateful to Michelle Terry, MD, an attending physician and clinical professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Washington School of Medicine who contributed her expertise in authoring this issue and to COMSEP and Career Advising Collaborative member, Abena Knight, MD who edited and collaborated in the writing of this issue.

Background:

Medical students seek residency programs that match their interests and are suited to help them reach their personal goals. When considering whether a program "fits," medical students should weigh and consider various attributes, including: size, location, proximity to family or support networks, programs of study, extracurricular activities, cost of living, opportunities to practice post residency, and resident life. With the knowledge that our Pediatric population continues to diversify and the racial reckoning of the past few years, medical students have become more socially aware of the importance of learning medicine in programs and at institutions that value diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

So, how do we advise students how to assess a program's commitment to DEI efforts, especially in the virtual setting?

Program & Department Mission Statement

First things first, students should take a look at the mission statement of the residency program, as well as that of the associated Department of Pediatrics.

Mission and vision statements convey the priorities and goals of an organization. Students should always check to see if their personal priorities and goals are in alignment with those of their future training programs.

- What does the program and the Department state are their values?
- Is diversity, equity, and/or inclusion part of their mission?

Program & Department Websites

Second, students should carefully review the program and departmental websites.

Website content should be representative of the individuals at the institution. Information shared should also be inclusive of the diverse needs and preferences of individuals with respect to medical training and related learning opportunities, and living in that location.

- Do the featured photos represent the make-up of their classes, faculty, and staff?
- Is there some diversity of faculty members among the departmental leadership?
- Is the information that is shared inclusive of different lifestyles and interests?
- Does the website highlight DEI programming, research, and/or committee work? And notably, is the information concordant with the mission and vision statements (if this was part of the program's stated mission)?

We do caution against eliminating programs due to perceived lack of diversity based on "stats." Numbers do not equate to commitment – effort does! Students may be able to identify whether there is momentum and/or a meaningful effort directed at challenging the status quo.

Interview Day

Third, students should pay attention to how diversity, equity, and inclusion are discussed and modeled during their interview day.

Students should consider how diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are presented. Programs should be able to talk about their successes in this work, as well as their areas requiring improvement. Remember, even the most diverse and inclusive institutions have issues that they face! If content here is not explicitly covered by the program, encourage your students to have prepared questions to ask during their interview day or in follow up conversations that might elucidate this information.

- Are pronouns mentioned/included?
- Do the residents, program directors, and faculty members talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives?
- Is there diversity in gender, race, background, etc. among the departmental and program leadership? If not, why?
- Does the residency have a diversity council? Is diversity addressed only by those who are underrepresented in medicine, or does everyone believe it is an important issue?
- Does the organization identify problems transparently?
- How are grievances and/or microaggressions reported and managed?
- Does the program or hospital offer mentorship to residents who self-identify as under-represented in medicine?

Patient Care and Educational Initiatives

Fourth, students should consider how diversity, equity, and inclusion are valued in patient care, education, and among staff.

Educational topics should include diversity and health equity topics beyond disparities in care and outcomes. Patients and staff should feel that these concepts are valued by the institution at-large.

- Does the organization endorse speakers for grand rounds and residency lectures who talk about diversity and health equity and/or are from underrepresented backgrounds?
- Does the program dedicate any curricular time to DEI-specific professional training or cultural humility in the practice of medicine (e.g. interrupting bias/microaggressions)?
- Do department faculty (outside of those on DEI committees) have opportunities or requirements to participate in DEI and cultural humility training? (This may help students get a sense of what the department commitment, in addition to the program's commitment, is to these initiatives).
- What is the method of interpretation used for patient care (in-person, video, phone)? What are the expectations around interpretation?
- Does the EMR have multiple options for gender identity and preferred names?
- Does the program and/or institution have named awards that honor diversity and equity initiatives?
- Have they heard of restorative justice?
- Do they sponsor affinity groups or provide spaces for individuals who are underrepresented, such as those who identify as LGBTQIA+?
- Does the institution initiate mentoring programs for faculty &/or staff?
- Do they offer training or research programs to provide continuing support across a physician's career?
 - This could take the form of research funding opportunities, grants for advocacy work for URM populations, equity/justice pathways, pipeline programming at different stages of training?
- Do they hire bilingual or multilingual employees (physician as well as other partners in patient care?)
- Have they implemented initiatives for gender equality?
- How have they provided accommodations for those with disabilities?
- Does the department/hospital support patient-centered programs or liaisons that help meet the needs of a diverse patient population?

Asking Questions

Last but not least, if something that a student values is not addressed, encourage them to find a space to ask!

This is their opportunity to have their questions answered. Questions can also be emailed after the interview day to those whom they have virtually met. They can ask the program for contacts if they would like input from someone with a particular background. Students should pay attention to personal discomfort when asking questions of importance. Remember, not every program will be a match!