

# Medical Students: The Dermatology Experience

## The St. Luke's Dermatology Interest Group – Dermatology Interest Group

SLUHN-DIG formed to provide students with the opportunity to be exposed to the field of dermatology early on in their undergraduate medical education. This group provides education, research, outreach and mentoring opportunities and encourages students to make connections with faculty members in the department. The group is advised by dermatologist Andrew C. Krakowski, MD and is not limited to students interested in dermatology - as all St. Luke's medical students are welcome to attend the organizational meetings, educational programs and activities to learn more about our specialty and its applications. SLUHN-DIG is a new chapter of the parent organization DIGA (<http://www.derminterest.org/updates.htm>) and provides the St. Luke's University Health Network medical students with leadership opportunities both on campus and at regional/national levels.

## Externship in Dermatology, Pediatric Dermatology, and Dermatopathology

An externship, or away rotation, is a clinical rotation that is completed at a different medical school (anywhere in the country they are offered). Externships are a great way to check out a specific program to see if it is “a good fit” for you. Externships are also a great way to get acquainted with a different set of faculty who can write a personal letter of recommendation, for example. Away rotations may be clinical or research oriented. Student may choose to do sub-specialty elective rotations in areas such as dermatopathology or pediatric dermatology. These “away” rotations provide the opportunity to see what it would be like to be a resident at that institution. Opportunities are limited so it is generally a good idea to start looking for externships in the spring of the 3rd year.

## Timeline

### 1st and 2nd Year Medical Students

- Meet with the Dermatology medical student advisor
- Get involved in basic science and/or clinical research (summer-long projects are helpful)
- Attend Dermatology lectures and Dermatology Grand Rounds

### 3rd Year Medical Students

- Apply for Dermatology electives or “externships”
- Consider a “research year”

### Spring 3rd Year

- Begin requesting letters of recommendation
- Plan 4th Year schedule including finalized plans for “away” rotations/externships
- Create a CV
- Write your personal statement
- Consider internship programs for your Preliminary Year
- Select an advisor in the Dermatology program
- Network with graduating seniors about their specific experiences

### Summer/Fall 4th Year

- Complete your “local” rotation in Dermatology (“Honors” would be the expected grade for an applicant)
- Complete any “away” rotations/externships
- Complete your Sub-I in medicine, surgery, and/or pediatrics (“Honors” would be the expected grade for an applicant)
- Finish your CV
- Finish your personal statement and get feedback
- Pick-up letters of recommendation
- Take application photos
- Complete ERAS application (after September 1)
- Register online for the NRMP Main Match
- Gather information and compare residency programs (i.e., using FRIEDA)
- Decide whether to apply for a backup specialty

### Winter 4th Year

- Leave open or with easier rotations so that you may interview around the country
- Finalize list of possible residency programs
- Send letters to your highest-ranked programs
- Decide your rank list
- Submit rank list online through the NRMP Main Match website
- Formulate a plan for scrambling/not matching

### 3rd Week of March

- Monday: All applicants are notified of their match status (matched or unmatched)
- Tuesday: “Scramble Day” in which unmatched applicants meet with advisor and contact programs with unfilled positions
- Thursday: “Match Day” – all applicants find out where they have matched

## Residency Training Program Information

AMA's search engine FRIEDA is a great resource to research different programs. All the individual programs list information on their websites and FRIEDA has links to most of the programs websites. It also allows you to search by area or specialty.

## ERAS Application

The application is set up like the one for medical school. Be prepared to list all your activities, research, volunteer work and awards with descriptions of activities, duties, positions held and dates. This whole process might be easier if you compile your CV ahead of time with descriptive paragraphs.

## Curriculum Vitae (CV)

You will need to submit your CV to your letter writers. It will help to have 2 versions. The first is for your reference. Keep it as long as you want. Include paragraph descriptions of what the organization does, mission statement, positions held and all duties. Also keep track of all the dates in which you were active in the organization or club. This version of the CV will help you fill out your ERAS application. It will also help you to review before all your interviews just in case you are asked about anything that you participated in during medical school. The second CV is to submit to your letter writers and programs. This one should be brief try to keep under two pages with your name at the top of all the pages. The CV should include: Your name, address, phone number, email, USMLE scores; Education: university, degree, major; Honors/Awards; Research; Publications; Extra-Curricular Activities including volunteer projects and organizations.

## Letters of Recommendation

You will need to ask for letters of recommendation early in your 4th year or late 3rd year. Remember to keep this in mind when you are on your rotations. Try to keep in touch with the attending physicians that you worked well with. The best letters are from people who knew you well, for example people that you did research with. Keep this in mind early on when you are looking for research projects. Be able to provide the persons writing your recommendation letters with your personal statement and Curriculum Vitae. (The CV without descriptions is usually more professional) You can send up to 4 letters not including your Dean's letter. You can use one of the 4 spots to include a resume; this is recommended by some schools. Remember thank you notes!

## **Program Application Deadlines**

ERAS does not set the application deadlines. All programs have their own deadlines with the majority in December. However, programs fill their interview spots, so the earlier the better!

## **Dean's Office**

Each medical school's dean's office has their own timeline and procedure for handling your transcript, recommendation letters, Dean's Letter, and application photo. Processing files may take a few weeks, so try to give the dean's office ample time to process your transcripts etc. If there is a problem with transmissions, you could miss a deadline. Use the Application Document Tracking System (ADTS) on the ERAS website to verify document transmission to your programs. Follow up on any missing documents.

## **Rank Lists**

The most important thing to remember about rank lists is to only rank programs that you would want to be a resident at! Given that dermatology is so competitive, some students choose to rank other specialty programs entirely and apply for entirely different programs and interview for two different specialties. Then, people rank their top choices in order (i.e. dermatology for their first few slots and then their second residency choice). This way they assure that if they do not match in dermatology, they would still match in a full residency program.

The second thing you could do is only rank dermatology along with ranking your internship programs. If you do not match for dermatology, you could still match for internship and then you will have another year to apply. Remember when you apply as an intern, you will have a year break in between the end of internship and the year you will hopefully start dermatology, so you will need to think of what you would like to do that year. Lastly, you could apply for dermatology and internship, but choose not to have an internship, unless you match in dermatology. The problem with this is if a spot in dermatology opens up then you will not have completed an internship and will not be eligible. The other plus in having completed an internship is it would allow you to apply for fellowships that require an M.D. and training. (possibly paid!)

### **What category of residency is Dermatology?**

The NRMP offers three types of postgraduate training positions in the Main Match: categorical (C), preliminary (P), and advanced (A). Categorical programs begin training at the first postgraduate year (PGY-1) and are completed in approximately 3 or more years. Examples include internal medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, general surgery, and pathology. Preliminary programs last only 1 year and exist to satisfy the 1-year prerequisite for advanced specialty programs. They are available through internal medicine, surgery, or a transitional year. Dermatology is an advanced residency program. These positions begin at the second postgraduate year (PGY-2), after a year spent in a preliminary program. Students apply to both advanced and preliminary programs at the same time. Other examples include ophthalmology, anesthesiology, and radiology.

### **What is the difference between “preliminary year” options?**

Preliminary medicine consists of one year of training in internal medicine. Responsibilities and call schedule are similar to those of categorical (3-year) interns. This is a good choice for students entering advanced specialties, such as dermatology, that heavily emphasize internal medicine. Preliminary surgery offers the same experience as that of an intern in general surgery. Most of these positions are informally assigned outside the Match to students who have already matched into an early surgical specialty, such as otolaryngology, urology, and neurosurgery. The transitional year is usually offered by community hospitals with a typical curriculum of rotations in internal medicine, emergency medicine, ambulatory medicine, and sometimes surgery, obstetrics, or critical care. All transitional year internships allow for 2 to 6 flexible months of electives. Because the level of clinical duties and call responsibilities are on par with those of a “fifth-year medical student,” these internships are highly competitive.

### **How many programs should I apply to?**

Dermatology is an extremely competitive specialty. Most programs interview about 30 candidates (out of hundreds of applicants) for only several positions. For this reason most students apply to nearly every program in the country. Estimates on the numbers of applications range from 40 to upwards of 70 programs. After 30 programs, ERAS charges \$25 to apply to each additional program (\$250 for every additional 10). Those applicants who secure 10 interviews have a statistically good chance at matching. It is recommended to attend as many interviews as possible to maximize your chances of matching.

## Enhancing Your Prospects

Here are some things to consider doing that may favorably enhance your position as an applicant to Dermatology:

- Try to identify your interest early in medical school
- Get involved with the St. Luke's Dermatology program as early as possible
- Participate in dermatology-related research and basic science
- Author/co-author publications in peer-reviewed journals (especially Dermatology-related journals)
- Be competitive with your Step 1 board scores (average is ~250 now!)
- Membership in AOA (the medical school honor society) is helpful
- Consistent "Honors" grades in your core clinical clerkships
- A grade of "Honors" for any Dermatology-related electives (especially externships)
- Faculty recommendations that speak to you as a human being; what is special about you and your interest in Dermatology

## Backup Plans

Everyone, regardless of their qualifications, needs to have a backup plan in case they do not match. Dermatology has one of the highest unmatched rates, so facing the reality of possibly not matching is only good planning. There are several options:

- Another Specialty. Through ERAS you can choose to apply in both dermatology and another specialty, such as internal medicine or pediatrics. Try to avoid other super-competitive specialties like radiology, ophthalmology, and orthopedics.
- Pursue an Intensive Research (Basic/Clinical) Position. You may choose not to rank any programs below those in your dermatology rank list (i.e. not rank any preliminary programs). If you do not match, then, you will not be committed to an internship year, and you can begin research ASAP if that is your interest. In this way some applicants work to improve their resume and increase their chances of matching the second time around.
- Start an Internship. This is the choice of most applicants. By completing an internship year you will be eligible for clinical research fellowships since a lot of fellowships require you to be an M.D. Sometimes spots in dermatology open up during the year, and you will only be eligible if you will have completed an internship on time. Also, perhaps doing a preliminary year in medicine will sway you to switch into the categorical program (i.e. the 3-year internal medicine residency).