

ASN Training Program Director's Executive Committee Guide to  
Interviewing fellowship Candidates

- I) Specialties Matching Service Match Participation Agreement: This agreement is a 19 page agreement covering all the terms and agreements of match participation between your program and the candidates. Please read the actual agreement but below is an important section on the restrictions on persuasion.
- 1) "One of the purposes of the SMS Matching Program is to allow both applicants and programs to make selection decisions on a uniform schedule and without coercion or undue or unwarranted pressure. Both applicants and programs may express their interest in each other; however, they shall not solicit verbal or written statements implying a commitment."
  - 2) "Applicants shall at all times be free to keep confidential the names or identities of programs to which they have or may apply. In addition, it is a breach of the applicable Match Participation Agreement for:
    - a. a program to request applicants to reveal ranking preferences; or
    - b. an applicant or a program to suggest or inform the other that placement on a rank order list is contingent upon submission of a verbal or written statement indicating ranking intentions; or
    - c. a program to require applicants to reveal the names or identities of programs to which they have or may apply; "

[http://www.nrmp.org/fellow/policies/map\\_sms.html](http://www.nrmp.org/fellow/policies/map_sms.html) (copy of the Terms and Conditions of the Specialties Matching Service Match Participation Agreement Among Applicants, the NRMP, and Participating Programs)

II) Legal aspects of interviewing: Applicants to fellowship positions are protected against discriminatory employment practices by the amended Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The interviewer should avoid questions that could seem problematic from a legal standpoint, such as those about height, weight, age, marital status, religious or political beliefs, dependents, birth control, birthplace, sexual orientation, race, and national origin. Some of this personal information is revealed in the application but you should avoid discussing this information during the interview to avoid the impression that the information may have an impact on the ranking process.

- 1) Do not ask about marital status, plans to marry, or about plans to become pregnant in the future.
- 2) Do not ask about the number and age of children or child care arrangements.
- 3) Do not ask about a spouse or significant other (employment status of spouse, plans to move, etc).
- 4) Do not ask about the presence of mental or physical disabilities, no matter how apparent.
- 5) Do not ask about religion.

On the other hand, if the candidate asks questions regarding topics such as, specifically, "family friendliness" of the community or department, current public policy issues in the community such as smoking laws or gay rights, availability of specific resources such as churches of a particular denomination or schools for autistic children, then it is permissible to discuss these issues.

<http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/practices/index.cfm> (website for the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Prohibited Employment Policies/Practices, see section titled "Pre-Employment Inquiries).

III) Your goal in interviewing a candidate is to determine his/her suitability for your specific program. With that in mind, the following suggestions for interview questions/topics are listed.

- 1) Anything having to do with their interest in nephrology
  - How did they become interested in nephrology?
  - What areas of nephrology are most appealing?
  - What were their prior experiences on renal services?
- 2) What they are looking for in a nephrology program
  - Clinical interests: any special interests such as stones, PD, etc.
  - Research interests
- 3) How did they hear about your program
  - Any particular questions about the program?
- 4) Future career plans
  - Private practice
  - Academics – clinician educator, basic research, clinical research (It is often helpful to ask what percent of their time they envision spending in research; i.e. someone who avows interest in a research fellowship, but states they will spend 15% of their faculty time doing research, is not really interested in a research career).
- 5) Details on their internal medicine training
  - Setting: private vs public, VA
  - ICU experience
  - Level of responsibilities
  - Experience on renal rotations or in interacting with renal service
- 6) How do they perceive their own strengths and/or weaknesses
  - Unique qualities or skills that they could bring to a program
  - Learning techniques
  - Outside interests

Helpful references

<http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/small/Di-Eq/Employment-Interviews.html> This is a nice short review on interview techniques from a business perspective but the principles would hold for trainee interviews as well.

<http://www.springerlink.com/content/jr475q7h2jg2248l/fulltext.pdf> This is a study looking at the factors that influenced decision making by trainees looking at fellowships in General Internal Medicine.

<http://jasn.asnjournals.org/cgi/reprint/18/4/1027> This is Mark Rosenberg's 2007 article in JASN outlining some challenges for fellowship programs.