

A NOVEL APPROACH TO INTERVIEWING RESIDENT APPLICANTS

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OBJECTIVES: General surgery is a popular, competitive specialty for resident applicants. Using conventional criteria such as class rank, standardized test scores and subjective letters of recommendation alone may not adequately predict the compatibility of trainees or their likelihood of success. In an effort to develop more strategic methods to evaluate resident candidates, we introduced a novel approach to augment the interview and evaluation process by having faculty and residents identify attributes of top resident performers in the discipline. We hoped that having a deeper understanding of how we characterize successful trainees would enable us to develop an interview approach designed to elucidate those characteristics.

DESCRIPTION: Prior to the interview season, a survey was sent to all faculty and residents asking them to describe the characteristics of both top and low performing residents. Based on these results, we designed an interview protocol and evaluation form enabling interviewers to ask questions targeting the extent to which the candidate demonstrated those characteristics. Three or four faculty interviewed each applicant incorporating targeted questions into their interviews and completed an evaluation form using a three-point scale rating the characteristics of interest. An overall score was then given to the candidate. Following discussion among all interviewers, candidates were sorted into three groups (high, medium or low) based on both the evaluations and the open-ended interview debriefing discussions.

DISCUSSION: Participating faculty showed overwhelming support for this novel approach to interviewing and evaluating resident candidates. Providing faculty with targeted questions facilitated an enhanced overall understanding about the extent to which a candidate may be a good match for our program. The success of this approach can only be measured longitudinally and with periodic reassessment. Though our approach was tailored to our department's culture and needs, other GME programs may use similar techniques to evaluate candidates' goodness-of-fit for their programs.