SO YOU WANT TO DO A RESIDENCY?

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GENERAL TIPS

- **Start early and take the process seriously.** Even though it can become exhausting, each step taken toward obtaining a residency position demands your diligent attention.

- **Work with each other** and work with the class ahead of you. There’s no manual for how to best navigate this process and the more experience and approaches you listen to, and ultimately draw from, the better.

- **NETWORK!** You’ve heard it a million times, but it remains true: pharmacy is a small world. Get to know as many people as you can in this “small world,” and prepare to be amazed with the “he knows him, who knows her, who highly recommends them” dialogue that ensues. Besides, it’s fun to meet new people and you can’t have too many resources. Start by contacting COP alumni and faculty and/or UIHC residents and practitioners. These individuals can offer insider opinions and be a friendly face at ASHP’s mid-year clinical meeting (MCM)...or even during your eventual interviews!
  - Use Dean Letendre. He is an amazing resource. Schedule a meeting with him before MCM and bring a list of specific residency programs that you are interested in and/or a list of qualities you want in your potential residency program. He may be able to add or subtract from your “interested” list or help you start one.
  - Use the COP faculty. If you know a faculty member who graduated from a particular school or trained/worked at a particular institution – talk to them about their “alma mater”. (Note: If you decide to apply to their institution, consider having this faculty member write a letter of recommendation on your behalf if appropriate).
Use the class ahead of you or current residents. They will be happy to mentoring students who are going through the same experiences they once did.

- Keep an organized folder, spreadsheet, and/or notebook of all program information you gather during your residency search.
  - Develop a system to keep track of the different people associated with different residency programs. Know who you have emailed and what you emailed them. Some level of organization will help you stay fresh and update yourself on certain programs specifics’ when needed.
  - Revisit these documents or notes and highlight your likes and dislikes.
- Be yourself. While it is important to know the programs’ strengths and weaknesses and where you augment them, do not change who you are to fit a residency. It's important to find the right residency and be happy for a year. Remember, programs do not want any surprises with their investment either (ie, you).

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION TIPS

- Preparation
  - Even if you’re only a P1 or P2, start thinking NOW about choosing your top 3 references. These letters represent an important piece of every good candidate’s application materials. Once you have potential references picked out, ask yourself: Will they give you a good recommendation? Do they know you well enough to talk about you personally? Could you potentially choose a “better” reference? Plan accordingly.
  - Check if any of your programs require letters from specific individuals (eg, a boss or a preceptor).
- MCM
  - Contact these individuals well before MCM to ask if they will write a positive letter on your behalf. Give them an estimate on how many programs you plan to
apply to and each program’s application deadline. Since these deadlines are usually at the end of Christmas break; asking for a letter or recommendation at the last minute over the holidays is an uphill battle and NOT recommended.

- When requesting letter, literally ask: Can you give me a positive recommendation?

- **Forms**
  - Although most programs require a standard recommendation form, an attached, separate letter of recommendation is most often welcomed.
  - After you decide where you will apply, provide a “packet” to each person writing your letters. Include necessary forms, addressed and stamped envelopes, and comprehensive directions. Since these people are kind enough to write letters on your behalf, make sure your materials and instructions are neatly organized. Consider including a thank you card along with this packet (or send one shortly thereafter).

- **Follow-up**
  - Approximately 3 days before your letters are due, follow-up with your references by sending an email to confirm that they submitted your letter. (Note: most programs will contact you if you are short components of your application one day prior to the deadline.)

**Curriculum Vitae (CV) Tips**

- Organization of your thoughts and experiences in preparation for making your CV is a big first step and something that you can start anytime in pharmacy school.

- At the very latest, draft your CV the summer before midyear (or before) since you will need time to refine it. Putting off writing your CV will lead to less time for necessary revisions. If you are ambitious, start compiling it during your P1 year. You will thank
yourself later. It’s a growing document that will be with you for the rest of your career so you might as well get a good start on it now.

- Compile your CV thoughtfully. Include your involvement within organizations, class and/or student council, public health community service, research with faculty, committee participation, IPPE and APPE experiences, and awards.

- Ask many people to review your CV; current residents and faculty are a great resource! Expect feedback and revisions.

- As a general guideline, keep it to 6 pages or less (you don’t want it to be longer than the person interviewing you). The farther back you can go with relevant information – the better. This shows a pattern of leadership. What’s relevant? The individuals mentioned in the previous tip can help you answer that question.

- Leave some teasers... don’t put in every little detail, leave something to discuss during the interview.

- Save as a PDF to preserve your formatting! This is absolutely essential and easily done in the COP computer lab.

- Make sure you can say something about each item on your CV. Your CV is the first place interviewers look to ask you questions. Interviewers may want to know your role within the various experiences listed on your CV, and also your ability to recall details about “listed” in-depth topics. If it’s on your CV, its fair game and interviewers won’t be afraid to challenge you.

- During MCM or prior to submitting your application, if you have an opportunity to ask a director or clinician about characteristics that stand out to them – or what they value in candidates – do it! There are mixed reviews about asking “what are you looking for in a candidate” verbatim. So think of asking this in a different way to get the same information. If you are ambitious, consider tailoring your CV to exactly what each program wants most in a resident (provided you actually meet these “wants”). For example, if community service and leadership are two categories that mean a lot to a
particular program you plan to apply to; title your CV sections accordingly or make sure and draw attention to these experiences in some fashion.

**MCM / Residency Showcase Tips**

- **Preparation**
  - Write out questions beforehand. Develop some standard questions that you can ask everyone. This will give you a basis to compare programs.
  - Don’t know what questions to ask? Ask a faculty member, current resident, or classmate to help compile a list.
  - Stratify your questions into 4 categories: questions for residents, questions for preceptors, questions for residency directors, and questions for pharmacy directors. There will be certain questions appropriate to ask more than 1 of these subgroups. Also, for those types of questions, you can gain different perspectives depending on who you ask.
  - Know information available on each program’s website. Rarely ask any questions that are answered on their website as this shows you haven’t done your homework.
  - Be organized! Know which programs will be at each showcase time (Monday afternoon, Tuesday morning, and Tuesday afternoon) and where their booth is located. Print off a map beforehand and highlight the booths you want to visit. In addition, manage your time wisely. Have an idea of what programs you MUST visit and which programs you could potentially spend less time speaking with.
  - Consider contacting programs ahead of time (October or November is a good bet). But remember, contacting a program before MCM should serve a purpose. Consider inquiring about information you do not have access to (eg, program structure, application request, resident contact info, etc.) This inquiry may give you a jump start on the competition as it allows your name to be seen by the program prior to them getting flooded with interested candidates. If you exchange meaningful emails prior to Midyear, it may allow the showcase to be
more of a “matching a name with a face” type of event rather than purely an
information gathering event. This could allow you to build more of a relationship
with potential programs.

- Practice your handshake. You will be shaking many hands, and a limp, lackluster
handshake is a poor first impression.

**During MCM**

- Converse with your classmates throughout the conference/showcase as they
may have stumbled across a program that is perfect for you - which you
overlooked! (and vice versa)

- Typically, the first person you will speak to each booth will be a current resident.
Have an idea on what you will initially say as you express interest in that
program and your desire to learn more about it.

- If you are interested in a program, make sure and learn its personnel. After
speaking with a resident at the booth, ask to speak with the residency director
(by name).

- It’s okay to repeat the same questions to different individuals within the same
program. Subjective questions spur conversation. Also, you will find opinions,
even within the same program, can vary considerably.

- Ask for informational handouts. This shows them that you want to know as much
as possible about the program, and the handouts function as a refresher in the
future.

- Ask for business cards and immediately write on the back of the card a) what you
talked about with that person and b) something about them (eg, when you speak
with a resident, ask about their short-term goals are and how their residency
training has helped to achieve these. This is an easy way to gain personal and
program information).

- It is common at MCM for the programs to have socials (receptions) during the
evenings. Residency directors or program preceptors sometimes invite
residency candidates to these. Also, by speaking with programs before midyear
you may get invites (especially to the socials which occur before the residency showcase – such as on Sunday/Monday night), or you may receive an invite when you visit with a program during the showcase. Go to these events. They are a great way to network and informally learn more about the program.

- **Dress professionally.** (Guys, unless you’re wearing a tux, you won’t be overdressed; A suit is a must)
- If you are especially interested in a particular program, ask Dean Letendre to introduce you to them. He usually will know someone at the program you are looking at, mostly likely the pharmacy director. Remember, be ready to ask your “director” questions after your introduction!

**After MCM**

- **Write thank you notes ASAP.** Consider taking blank notes with you to MCM so you can write “thank-yous” during your down time while the content of that day’s conversations is still fresh in your mind.

**APPLICATION TIPS**

- Consider registering for the match before MCM or soon after. This way you can have your match number ready to put on your applications.
- **Draft a letter of intent early** (before MCM)! Once you have a skeleton version, you can easily tailor it to each program you apply to. Know some specifics about each program and include those. Spend some quality time on the letter of intent/letter of interest/cover letter. This is a great opportunity to really catch a program’s attention. You can’t change a lot of your CV but the letter of interest allows you to fill in those intangible gaps that are left out. Have a few different people review it for flow, grammar, and its “lasting impression”.
  - **Note:** “A cover letter is a brief explanation that you are applying for the job, including your CV/resume, and contact information for questions/comments. A letter of intent explains your intention to apply, followed by why you are applying and what skills you bring to the program. It is a great opportunity to
weave in specific aspects you possess. Most programs use this as a test of your writing skills, but they do not want a 2 page essay. Review the application as some programs want specific content in the letter of intent (i.e., career objectives, goals, etc.). Keep it brief and to the point.” If you are sending a letter of interest, you typically do not include a cover letter.  *(Aforementioned tips courtesy of Majid Tanas – University of Washington administrative resident)*

- **Transcripts**  Most programs will require you to send these. Also, check if you need to include undergraduate transcripts in addition to COP transcripts. Some programs do not specify but actually want all transcripts. Make sure to request your transcripts early to give the university plenty of time to send them out. Figure out the process of transcript requests before MCM and then put in these requests as soon as you decide where you will apply! Also, on residency applications GPA is considered but this will likely be the last time you use it.

**INTERVIEW TIPS**

- **Preparation**
  - Obtain a list of commonly asked residency interview questions. Make sure these cover a variety of styles (behavioral, situational, etc) that address a broad range of topics. Write out answers to questions using a small notebook (one page per question and answer) or note cards (question on front / answer on back). Practice answering each question mentally and then out loud. To aid with memory retention, consider transcribing or reciting your answers many times. Informally run your answers by classmates to get feedback.
  - PLAN AHEAD: During your rotations write down any therapeutic interventions you made on a patient’s behalf (utilize E-value). Residency interviews include many questions about specific interventions you have made and how you have impacted patients. Write down the situation, patient characteristics, steps you took – drugs used or changed, outcome, and how you worked with the other healthcare professionals.
Have the most common questions down cold! Tell me about yourself, why do you want do complete a residency, why here, and what you hope to get out of it.

Practice, practice, practice! Having a mock interview with someone allows you to actually say your answers on the spot and hear if they sound right. Participating in mock interviews with people you respect provides a forum for constructive criticism and helps build interview confidence.

Consider audio- or videotaping yourself. This allows you to see how you look from the interviewer’s standpoint.

Know your tendencies (eg, hunched shoulders, tapping, hand talking) and work on eliminating them.

Know your interviewers. Know their names, title, degrees, area of emphasis, research interests; and consider asking specific questions related to them (ie, I see you have a lot of papers out in cystic fibrosis, are you working on any projects currently that could involve residents?)

Spread your interviews dates out if possible. They are exhausting.

If you must decline an interview remember to thank them over and over again. Again, pharmacy is a small world. Programs talk. This gesture is common courtesy.

• Interview Day
  
  If they have a dinner the night before – go! This is a great way to break the ice and a good time to ask questions.
  
  On your interview day, arrive early and dress professionally.
  
  Shake hands, smile, and have good eye contact with your interviewer(s).
  
  Do not be negative - especially about people, and particularly patients! Further, do not express frustration with patients as you are going to be dealing with patient-related issues day in and day out. If they ask you your biggest pet peeve, don’t say anything about people in general.
Always have questions in your pocket to ask the residents, preceptors, and residency directors. No matter what, have questions available to ask. It can be extremely helpful in an awkward situation or silence to ask a well prepared question. This not only shows how much you want to learn about the residency, but also allows you time to re-gather your thoughts. Do research on the program and try to ask specific questions about the place you are interviewing. Probably have about 10 questions for residents, 10 questions for residency directors, 10 questions for clinicians/preceptors, and also a few questions for the pharmacy director should you meet him or her. You will be amazed how much time you have to ask questions and how many times you are asked, “Do you have any other questions?”

As hard as it is, try to relax! Don’t be afraid to ask the residents what they do for fun or what they would change about the residency.

Remember, it’s cliché but true: they aren’t just interviewing you; you are interviewing them as well. This is the best time to find out which programs fit with your professional goals.

• **Post-Interview**

  - Take a deep breath!
  - Write thank you notes right away as they add up quickly (During airport layovers is a great time!). Make sure to write a thank-you to every program, even if you know you will not be ranking it in the Match.
  - Create a list of the positives and negatives about the program, or just jot down some thoughts/notes soon after your interview. It can become difficult after multiple interviews to remember all of the specific qualities your liked/disliked about each program.
  - If you think of a good question at a future interview that you wish you had asked at a previous one (this will happen), do not hesitate to contact one of that previous program’s residents or the residency director to have it answered.