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To: Faculty and Student Affairs Colleagues

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Subject: Checklist for Advising At-risk Students

As you may be aware, the Match has become increasingly more competitive. Overall, there were 29,171 positions and 34,355 active applicants in the 2013 Main Residency Match, the largest on record, according to the National Resident Matching Program® (NRMP®). There has been significant growth in the number of applicants with 17,487 U.S. M.D. seniors, 960 more over 2012. Increases also occurred with other applicant types: 2,677 D.O. students (317 more over 2012) and 12,663 international medical graduates (1,556 more over 2012).

In 2013, 16,390 U.S. M.D. seniors matched, a rate of 93.7 percent and a decrease from the 2012 high of 95.1 percent. However, other applicant groups (international medical graduates and U.S. D.O. graduates) saw an increase in their match rates. While there are enough slots for all U.S. M.D. students, they are competing with large numbers of IMG and D.O. students for these slots.

To assist our colleagues who advise students in this challenging environment, the AAMC Careers in Medicine program is providing the attached Checklist for advising at-risk students. While the checklist provides a framework for advising students at risk for going unmatched, we think it is applicable for all students who will enter the 2014 Match.

Please share the checklist with colleagues who are assisting students in selecting their specialties and preparing their residency applications.
Checklist for advising at-risk students

Goals

- Review residency application materials and the program list the student has applied to
- Assess and discuss the competitiveness of students for their chosen specialty and/or programs
- Explore parallel plan specialty and residency program options
- Discuss advantages and disadvantages of implementing a parallel plan
- Prepare a timeline and task list for implementing a parallel plan

Advising Framework

Advising a student at risk of going unmatched is a challenge; you must be prepared to have a difficult conversation that balances a realistic assessment of their probability of matching with their desire to pursue their specialty of choice. Prepare for this difficult conversation by reviewing current and relevant match outcomes data and the residency program landscape for their specialty of interest and any potential back-up options.

Before meeting with the student

☐ Review:

- The student’s academic performance including:
  - USMLE® exam scores
  - course and clerkship grades
  - clerkship evaluation comments
  - class rank (if applicable)
  - professionalism concerns
  - research (especially relevant to specialty of choice)
  - other attributes that may enhance the student’s application (e.g., EMT training for a student pursuing an emergency medicine residency)
- The joint AAMC and NRMP® Charting Outcomes in the Match report on for the characteristics of matched and unmatched applicants in the student’s specialty of interest.
- Any school-based match data for ranges of USMLE board scores, academic record, program types and locations, and number of students entering the specialty of interest.
- The results of the 2012 NRMP® Program Director Survey to understand how program directors value elements of the application and application process.

☐ Identify the “red flags” facing the student in securing a residency position.

☐ Meet with the student affairs dean to discuss your concerns about the student.

During the student meeting

☐ Ask questions to clarify his/her situation and understanding:

- How many and what types of programs are you applying to?
- (If applications have already been sent) How many interviews have you gotten so far?
- How do you feel your qualifications compare to other students pursuing the specialty, and the types (academic or community) and locations of programs you are pursuing?
- What advice or feedback have you received about the application process, programs, and your qualifications from faculty or physicians in your specialty of choice?
Advising Students

- What other specialties did you consider when making your specialty decision?
- What geographic restrictions do you have in considering residency programs?
- Have you considered applying to a second specialty?
- Do you understand the difficulty of securing a residency position during the Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program® (SOAP®)?

☐ Realistically discuss the student’s chances of matching in their specialty of choice based on school and national match data. Review the data with the student. Review the number of positions available and number of applicants in SOAP to underscore the dearth of opportunities if the student does not match.

☐ Review and brainstorm possible actions to optimize his/her chances of matching
  - Apply to more programs in the specialty of choice (more geographic areas, less competitive programs, different program types).
  - Review the school match data for past several years and encourage the student to apply to programs that often accept the institution’s students.
  - Accept every interview offer. (The student may want to consult with the Financial Aid Office since travel to interviews can be costly.)
  - Contact faculty in their specialty of choice and request the faculty member reach out to advocate for the student at programs where they may have professional connections.
  - Contact recent graduates from the school at programs of interest to gain insight for interviews and network.
  - Implement a parallel plan. A parallel plan is an alternative specialty (for which the student is more competitive) and plan for applying in the event their first preference for a specialty doesn’t work out.

☐ Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of applying to a second specialty. Things the student must consider include:
  - Increasing the likelihood of matching, especially if the student is more competitive for the parallel plan specialty. Can the student be just as satisfied in this secondary specialty? Can fellowship opportunities in the less competitive specialty offer satisfaction?
  - Timing in the application process. Specialties that tend to be less competitive also tend to offer interviews earlier and may want to see a passing score on the USMLE Step 2 exam. A student pursuing a parallel plan in a less competitive specialty will need to implement his/her plan quickly.
  - Developing new application materials including a personal statement and soliciting new letters of recommendation.
  - Geographically separating applications or interviews to different specialties. For some specialties with limited slots, the student may need to apply to most or all of the programs. Applying to or interviewing with two different specialties in the same hospital can prove awkward, and no program director wants to feel as though their program is a back-up option. Encourage the student to either geographically separate their applications to different specialties or, if they do apply to two specialties in the same hospital, then only interview with one.

☐ Based on your discussion, develop a plan of action and timeline.

After the student meeting

☐ If the student is pursuing your discipline, consider reaching out to your colleagues at other programs to advocate on behalf of the student during the application and interview process.

☐ Check in regularly during the application and interview process to check on the student’s progress.
CiM Tools and Resources available on [www.aamc.org/cim](http://www.aamc.org/cim)
- Medical specialties information including data on competitiveness
- Residency Preference Exercise
- Parallel plan and gauging competitiveness articles
- Frequently Asked Interview Questions
- Match Timeline

Other Resources
- AMA’s [FREIDA Online database](https://www.freida.org)
- AAMC's [Electronic Residency Application Service® (ERAS®)](http://eras.org)
- The [National Resident Matching Program (NRMP)](http://www.nrmp.org)
- The [San Francisco Matching Program](http://www.sfmatch.org)
- The [American Urological Association Residency Match Program](http://www.auanet.org)
- Residency program Web sites
- School match lists from previous matches