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Violations of Match Rules: Asking for a Commitment During the Interview

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Background: Applicants to residency face a number of difficult questions during the interview process. One type of question, which is expressly forbidden to ask, is that of a program asking for a verbal or written commitment to rank the program highly. The regulations governing the NRMP match expressly forbid any residency programs asking or requiring such a commitment.

Methods: We conducted a cross sectional survey of US applicants applying in five specialties (Emergency Medicine, Internal Medicine, OB/GYN, Orthopaedics, and General Surgery) during the 2006-2007 interview season through the Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS) of the AAMC. Applicants were asked to recall if they experienced questions that asked them to provide any sort commitment (verbal or otherwise) stating they would rank a program highly. Applicants were provided with a unique ID from ERAS anonymizing them to the study authors.

Results: Of the 13,372 applicants surveyed, 6,981 returned a valid completed survey (52.2%%). Overall 18.3% of applicants stated they were asked for a commitment. 15.3% of applicants to Emergency Medicine, 14.9% of those in Internal Medicine, 24.1% in Ob/Gyn, 29.3% in Ortho, and 22.4% in General Surgery were asked to commit to a program during the interview. In comparison to Emergency Medicine, ORs for other specialties asking for a commitment were: .96 (.78-1.19) for IM, 1.75 (1.36-2.25) for Ob/Gyn, 2.29 (1.74-3.02) for Ortho and 1.59 (1.23-2.05) for General Surgery. 64.7% of applicants felt uncomfortable or very uncomfortable sharing this information, and 33.0% stated they would be less likely or much less likely to rank the program highly because of the question.

Conclusion: Applicants to residencies are being asked questions expressly forbidden by the NRMP match. Among the five specialties surveyed, Orthopaedics and Ob/Gyn have the highest incidence of this type of violation. Asking for a commitment makes applicants less likely to rank a program highly.