

# How to Survive the Scramble: A Program Director's Guide

Amy M. Sands, MD  
University of Buffalo

## Background Information:

Beginning as 12:00 PM EST on Tuesday of Match week, a brief period of time is set-aside for those applicants who did not match or partially matched to attempt to obtain positions in unfilled programs before 12 noon on Match Day. This two day time period is commonly known as the "Scramble". One particular goal of this time period is to allow US medical school seniors find a residency position before Match Day to allow them to participate in their school's Match Day ceremonies.

In 2007, there were 1,331 positions available in the scramble, with 514 US Seniors and 7,468 IMGs seeking those positions (not including those who participate in the scramble without participating in the match). It should be noted, that unfilled positions can be filled at anytime prior to the start of the academic year, and do not have to be filled during the scramble.

## Time Table:

### **Monday of Match Week:**

- 11:30 am: Deans for Student Affairs for the medical schools receive a list of those medical students who did not match.
- 12 noon: Applicants may find out if they matched or not (but not where they matched).

### **Tuesday of Match Week:**

- 11:30 am: Program Directors and institutional officials learn whether their programs filled. Program Directors are e-mailed the number of their positions filled and unfilled.
- 12 noon: The list of unfilled programs ("*Dynamic List of Unfilled Programs*") is available on the NRMP web site to all unmatched and partially matched applicants who submitted a certified rank order list, and to all program directors of unfilled programs (as well as to institutional officials). This list is updated by the NRMP every hour to reflect the number of remaining unfilled positions.

### **Wednesday of Match Week:**

- 2:00 PM: Programs find out which applicants matched to their program (but it is confidential until 1 PM Match Day).

### **Thursday of Match Week:**

- 1:00 PM: Match Day!! Match results posted to Web site. After this, programs may contact those applicants matching to their program.

## Navigating the Scramble: The Applicant's Perspective:

Many resident and fellowship applicants await the "scramble" as an important opportunity to secure a position. All applicants who did not match and were enrolled in the match are eligible to see the unfilled program's list and apply for these positions. However, even those applicants (around the world) who did not use the match may get access to the unfilled program list through friends, contacts, etc. Thus, some candidates will have participated in the match, and others will not (for a variety of reasons, including only recently passing USMLE examinations).

- Use of Professional Services: Increasing numbers of applicants are using "services" that, for a fee, promise to e-mail or fax the candidate's application materials to programs/program directors as quickly as possible (mass faxing and e-mailing). One example of such a service is <http://www.imgresidency.com/> (there are many others).
- These unmatched applicants often consider programs that they had not previously considered.
- Conventional wisdom holds that it is very helpful for these candidates to speak personally to the Program Director.

### Navigating the Scramble: The Program Director's Perspective:

The PD's goal is to find and get a commitment from the best possible applicant(s) to fill unexpected opening(s) in time for the applicant to "start on time". It is often believed (but not always true) that the best applicants must be identified and signed up very quickly (before another program signs them up). This can lead to making hasty decisions. Those programs that are best able to deal with a potential actual vacancy are most able to "take their time" to fill an open slot.

- Make sure you have **given the NRMP the most appropriate contact information** (phone, fax, and/or e-mail address) and have answered the very important question "Do you use ERAS for the Scramble?" You should consider very carefully what information, if any, you wish to provide to unmatched applicants who contact your unfilled program. For example, if you want applications only through ERAS, you should probably leave the phone, fax, and e-mail address fields blank.
- Remember that the many applicants throughout the WORLD will be in a race to contact you ASAP. You will have only 30 minutes to **prepare for the onslaught of applications**.
- If you listed phone numbers, consider immediately putting a **message on your answering machine** giving the applicant the information they need to apply to your program. Arrange an alternate phone number and alternate fax number to give to your most important contacts (as your primary phone line and fax are likely to be constantly busy for the next few days). Think about whether you want to receive faxes from applicants or not. If not, consider turning off your fax machine.
- **Prepare for the possibility your e-mail service will "go down"**. Clean out old e-mails to open up memory space if possible. It is possible that so many individuals will send their applications (with all their documents by attachments) that your e-mail will be overloaded within a very short period of time. This may result in you not being able to communicate by e-mail.
- **Consider requiring all applications to be made through ERAS**. Doing this will help you use the ERAS sorting tools to identify the best applicants (and conserve your office resources). ERAS will allow any applicant who participated in ERAS during the current year to apply to a maximum of 30 programs free of charge.
- **Take calls from your medical school administration** (and other school administration, department chairs, program directors, and clinical colleagues). They may be trying to place a medical student who did not match and desires a position in your specialty.
- **Clear your agenda**, if possible, so you are available to take the calls from clinical colleagues and school administrators who wish to recommend a particular applicant to you and your program, and also so you will have time to interview applicants.
- **Review the applications** sent to you on ERAS (and by e-mail).
- **If you fill** one or more of your positions, immediately **notify the NRMP** of this, so that the "dynamic" list of unfilled positions by specialty is updated.
- Programs that do not fill all of the positions during the scramble are often able to invest time in a more complete review of submitted applications.
- **Consider using FindAResident**, a program sponsored by the AAMC, particularly if you have not filled your position by "Match Day" (i.e. in the post scramble period).
  - FindAResident: <http://www.aamc.org/programs/findaresident/start.htm> is a web-based service provided by the AAMC is designed to help ACGME accredited residency or fellowship programs fill open residency and fellowship positions. This program supplements ERAS and is especially helpful for filling unexpected vacancies (including the scramble post-match vacancies, positions that arise during ERAS off-season, and non-ERAS specialties).