

dear residents

Post-Interview Communication

October 8, 2023

Dear Residents,

For those of you who are pursuing fellowships – I expect you’ve completed many of your interviews and are thinking through the etiquette of post-interview communication and conveying ranking intentions. [NRMP](#) states that ***Both applicants and programs may express their interest in each other; however, they shall not solicit verbal or written statements implying a commitment.*** The NRMP Match algorithm works best when everyone does what is best for them without the pressure to disclose their preferences. You should submit a ranked list of your true preferences for programs and keep this information confidential. Similarly, programs should submit a ranked list of their true preferences for applicants. Strategically, there is no incentive to do anything else. There is no need for applicants to guess what the programs think of them. There is no need for programs to figure out how highly applicants rank them. Total honesty becomes the best strategy for everyone involved.



Photo by [Glenn Carstens-Peters](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The [literature](#) suggests that the above guidance falls apart because many program directors and applicants want to express their preferences and gauge each other's intentions. How should you handle this? There are several possible approaches:

1. **Say nothing, and let the Match do its work** – this is what NRMP would like you and the program directors to do – and if everyone did this uniformly, there would be no winners and no losers because everyone is playing by the rules and acting in their own best interest. Some program directors carefully hide their email address. Perhaps they don't want to be contacted. You would have to search PubMed to find an article where they were the corresponding author thereby discovering their email address. Perhaps it's best not to engage in any post-interview or ranking communication. But we are all human and we can't help it. This is high stakes for both the applicant and the program. Where you match for fellowship is often where you will practice and live (at least in the same region).
2. **Write a brief post-interview thank you letter or email.** Don't make it long. Talk about them, not you. Thank them for the opportunity to interview. Highlight your draw to their institution. Don't provide additional details about yourself. Don't ask questions – in other words don't try to take off where the interview ended. Don't make requests. Check for typos. Mail merge will get you with a font change. Be careful. Don't expect a reply. You might get one, but you might not. No program director wants to lead you on, and they may not have completed interviewing everyone. No reply does not mean that you are not on this rank list. If you do have important clarifying questions, ask the program coordinator.
3. **If you found your dream fellowship** – you can choose to let them know that you are ranking them #1 – but be honest. As a PD, if I receive a #1 ranking email, I will believe it. But it won't change how I rank the applicant. If I get a "top 2" email – it means I am #2. If I get a "top 3" email, it means I am #3. And if I get a "ranking you very highly" email – it means I am their safety program. Some programs (and it is common knowledge which ones they are) won't rank you unless you commit to #1 to them. This is unfortunate and one day I hope someone will call them out on this. This scheme causes you to decide between your dream program and the one you think you are more likely to match in. If program X will only rank you if you commit to ranking them #1, but you would like to match in Program Y which is a better program, but you feel that it's a long shot, instead of ranking program Y #1 and taking your chances, you are coerced into ranking Program X #1. It's a [Nash Equilibrium](#) of sorts without enforceability. Please do rank every program you would be willing to train at. Most residents match in one of their top 3-4 choices.
4. **Let us do the work for you** – I am happy to call or write to the program you really want to go to. It's best if you ask me to write to one program only. I want to be honest and straightforward and maintain trust with fellowship directors.

I fully recognize how stressful this time is for you. UTSW residents are coveted by fellowship directors. They know you are well-trained and fellowship ready. But I also know that cardiology, hematology/oncology and gastroenterology are very competitive which does mean that not matching the first time around is a possibility. That's OK because our unmatched residents have generally matched in subsequent years or have found other fulfilling careers. We are here to support you throughout the process. Please lean on me or our fellowship directors or your associate program directors for guidance and advice. A successful fellowship match is a crucial metric for our program.

I am here because of you and for you,

Dino Kazi