

dear residents

Rigor Builds Competence while Vigor Sustains Meaning

November 2, 2025

Dear Residents,

An applicant recently told me they were looking for a program that is *rigorous*. I paused, wondering what they meant. Were they saying they're hardworking and unafraid of testing situations? Or were they asking something deeper: whether we could uphold high standards without losing sight of balance, meaning, and humanity? The question about rigor was paired with queries about mentorship, which is another frequently asked question. I think applicants want to work hard but want to be guided and supported while doing so. This makes sense now, but it didn't seem like mentorship was at the forefront in prior eras. I think what was called supervision morphed into more [formalized mentorship programs](#).

For many of us who trained in an earlier era, rigor meant endurance. Residency was a *rite of passage*. A trial by fire that tested our limits and proved our devotion. We were proud of our toughness, even as we felt under siege. Fatigue became a badge of honor. We believed that only by pushing ourselves to exhaustion could we become competent. And yes, some of that was true: those years carved depth and discipline into us. But they also left scars we rarely acknowledged.

Today, I see rigor differently. True rigor isn't about depletion. It's about **discipline**. It is **structured**: a system of supervision, feedback, and evaluation. It is **objective**: grounded in evidence, competencies, and measurable outcomes. It ensures **safety and excellence** ensuring that every patient encounter meets professional and ethical standards. And it demands **discipline of thought**: diagnostic precision, clinical reasoning, and sound judgment under uncertainty. Rigor, at its best, safeguards both patients and residents. It doesn't break you; it **builds you**.

But residency must also be **vigorous**: alive with curiosity, energy, and awe. Vigor is what keeps the work from becoming mechanical. It's the spark that appears when a complex case finally makes sense, the wonder you feel when a patient's resilience humbles you, the inspiration drawn from a teammate's quiet act of generosity in the middle of the night. Vigor reminds us that learning is not just intellectual, it's emotional, moral, and deeply human. It's what keeps you awake to the privilege of being here.

When rigor and vigor coexist, residency becomes more than training. It becomes transformation. You learn to pair structure with soul, precision with presence, excellence with empathy. It remains a rite of passage, yes, but one defined not by suffering, rather by **growth, purpose, and becoming**.

This program ensures the development of broad competence and strives to imbue meaning to all that you encounter and accomplish. I know there are times it doesn't feel that way, but it will become clearer as you finish training and often even clearer when you look back at this time several years from now. Though my own residency ended more than three decades ago, I still remember several patients by name. I can picture the

hallways, the doors, the signs; I can recall the smell of the emergency department and the cafeteria, the quiet walk back to the parking lot after a long day. Those memories linger, not because they were easy, but because they mattered. Meaning reveals itself slowly, often in hindsight, carried in the sensory traces of who we were becoming.

Daylight saving time is ending. Soon, you'll be walking back to the parking lot at dusk, or later still. The sun may become something you glimpse only through the hospital windows. This stretch of the year can feel harder, but it remains full of meaning. Know that we see you, and we're here to support you.

With admiration,

Dino Kazi