

dear residents

The Honest Next Step

January 18, 2026

Dear Residents,

Now that we are well into January, those who have already matched into fellowships or secured jobs are planning ahead - signing contracts, finding new places to live, and beginning to imagine life beyond residency. There can even be a kind of [nostalgia](#) for the present. Others are preparing to decide on their next step, or to firm up plans already in motion. Some of you came to residency “undifferentiated” or “evolving” (not my words, these are yours, from your ERAS applications). Others arrived with well-laid plans that may, or may not, have changed along the way.

In [The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny](#), Kiran Desai writes of Sunny:

“Sunny had a sense of having misunderstood the country of his birth, of having considered it primitive for the purpose of leaving it, and misunderstanding Italy as well, misusing it to solve his personal anxieties and shames. He’d spent so long focused upon the West, he knew less about himself than many Westerners did, and how could he not be doomed to get everything wrong, the East and the West, the First World and the developing world, himself and Sonia?”

It’s a passage about dislocation, but also about the anxiety of choosing incorrectly. About believing that the *right* place, the *right* decision, or the *right* next step will finally quiet uncertainty.

January often feels like this in residency. Questions come sharply into focus: *Am I choosing the right subspecialty? Have I found the right mentor? What if I miss the moment or make the wrong call?* It can feel as though everyone else knows something you don’t.

In [Think Again](#), Adam Grant describes how people can become trapped by early commitments, continuing down paths not because they remain right, but because changing course feels like failure. Medicine, with its long timelines and identity-defining milestones, can make this especially hard. The longer you’ve invested in a direction, the more pressure you may feel to stay put. It probably begins in childhood when we are often asked, “what do you want to be when you grow up?” It’s as if growing up is a finite thing. The trouble is that it leads to a fixed mindset and funnily enough we get this gritty stubbornness to stay committed to some early decision - an identity foreclosure of sorts.

I recognize this feeling personally. My father wanted me to pursue orthopedics. Everyone around me echoed it. I was expected to follow in his footsteps. I chose internal medicine instead. Later, I thought I might go into infectious diseases. Then endocrinology. Each step felt intentional at the time, and each taught me something

important. Only later did I recognize that rheumatology had been there in me all along. I simply hadn't yet learned how to see it.

There is a quiet parable of a man who travels far in search of a treasure, only to discover it buried beneath his own home. The journey was not a mistake. Leaving was necessary. But the treasure was never entirely elsewhere.

Careers often unfold this way. Clarity is rarely immediate. Mentors often become visible only after you begin walking a path. Interests mature through exposure, not prediction. What may feel like indecision is often discernment in progress.

If you are worried right now about choosing incorrectly, take some comfort in this: very few meaningful careers are built in a straight line. The next step does not have to be perfect. It simply must be honest. In time, you may discover that what you were searching for was already taking shape within you, waiting to be recognized.

Warm Regards,
Dino Kazi