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RE: Doximity and U.S. News and World Report on the Top Medical Residency Programs for 2015

Dear Students,

You may have recently seen that Doximity has partnered with U.S. News and World Report to generate a list of the Top Medical Residency Programs for 2015. As mentors and counselors for students applying to residency, we appreciate the appeal of such a list – it implies a measure of how “competitive” a residency program might be. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth.

Last year, the list was generated from a survey. The population surveyed included only those physicians registered on Doximity, and asked them to rank their “top 5” residency programs. Unlike other U.S. News & World Report rank lists, no objective criteria were used and indeed, no such criteria currently exist. In this era of crowdsourced opinions, you might think that a survey is a valid way to create a rank list. However, the vast majority of practicing emergency physicians has intimate knowledge of only one residency program and no basis for comparing other programs. The small percentage of those in academics might have detailed knowledge of one or two more. Thus, the 2014 survey results really reflected a ranking of the programs with the most alumni who were members of Doximity and were willing to vote in the survey.

A joint letter, written by 9 of the major organizations representing over 40,000 Emergency Physicians -nearly all of Emergency Medicine (including SAEM, the parent organization of CDEM)- was sent to U.S. News and World report last year, detailing numerous concerns about the Top Residency Programs list. This letter has been included for your review. Recently, a number of residency program directors have publicly announced that their residency will not be participating in the 2015 survey (over 100 at last count, with new announcements daily). On May 30, the Council of Emergency Medicine Residency Directors sent out an email objecting to the methods and validity of the survey, thanking those programs that have already opted out, and encouraging all Emergency Medicine residency programs to opt out. It is not known if Doximity will include programs that have requested to opt out of the survey in the ranking or not. You can imagine that if they are included, they will not rank well if no one from those programs responds to the survey.

The likely result is that the 2015 survey results will represent a ranking of those residency programs with the most alumni who are members of Doximity and decided to participate in the survey again this year.

This leaves you, the student, without a reliable ranking of the Top Residency Programs. It is important to understand that the utility of such a list is questionable. Those of us who advise students know that there is no “top” residency program. Each program offers unique characteristics that may create a better fit for one resident or another. Choosing a residency program is something like buying a car or finding the right place to live (Rent a small apartment? Buy a house? Live on a sailboat?) – there are countless variables to consider and everyone weighs the importance of each variable differently. When evaluating residency programs, every student has different criteria important to him or her, different needs as a learner, different post-residency goals. The top program for one student may be completely wrong for another. The concept of a universal Top Residency is simply not valid.

If you need guidance as to where to apply to residency, please talk with your advisors, your clerkship director, and other Emergency Physicians. Some online advising resources include:

<http://www.emra.org/students/advising-resources/>

<http://emadvisor.blogspot.com/>

<http://med.wmich.edu/education/internshipresidency/emergency-medicine/advice-emergency-medicine-applicants>

Keep in mind that the advice you get from any of these potential sources still reflects the opinions and experiences of the writer – someone with intimate knowledge of only a few programs at most. In the end, only you can decide which residency program belongs at the top of your rank list.

Sincerely,

Executive Committee of the Clerkship Directors in Emergency Medicine

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