

NEUROSURGERY

Specialty: Neurosurgery

Did you use ERAS or SFMatch or Other: SFMatch

Number of programs applied to: 42

Was this number sufficient? Yes

Number of interviews attended for specialty: 14

Was this number sufficient? Yes

Interview season (month/year): 10/05 to 1/06

Typical structure of interview day: Dinner the night before the interview. Full day of interviews with every attending at the program and then 1 or 2 residents. Every place gave a tour. Loyola had us come out the day before (optional, but “strongly recommended”) and had us spend a day rotating through the ORs with all of the attendings (I really enjoyed this format). Dinner was that night and then we had interviews the next morning. NYU recommended we come in a day early and go to their conference day and then the interviews followed the next day. By far, the dinners are the hardest part. They try to overstuff you with food, keep you out late, and at two places, tried to get the applicants drunk the night before the interview. Some of the applicants liked that, some didn’t. Personally, I think midnight to 1 AM is a good time to call it quits and head for the hotel. The following day is grueling. The interview process is brutal and exhausting, but there are a lot of enjoyable moments too. You’ll have some pretty famous people devoting all of their attention to you for 15-20 minutes. So try to enjoy yourselves.

Popular topics covered in the interviews: Why do you want to be a neurosurgeon?? What makes you stand out as an applicant? Compare your home school program with a program you did an away rotation at? (THAT’S A POPULAR ONE) You always want to show that you are interested in pursuing academic neurosurgery. Your desire to go to a geographic area will be tested. Some places will really pick at research you’ve done (definitely read over stuff you’ve done in the past and that’s on your application).

Some difficult questions/unusual tasks (tying knots, etc.): Be ready for anything. At Loyola I scrubbed in and retracted. I also helped lock the head into place before the procedure. If someone asks you to scrub in, tie, etc – do it, but it is extremely rare for it to happen (don’t worry about it). The best thing you can do on an interview and even on your Sub-Is is to go with the flow. Just do whatever anyone asks, stay calm, show interest, and be yourself.

Be ready to defend your choice of away rotations (why didn’t you pick their program to spend time at)?

People saw that I was born, lived, went to school, college, and med school in the Philly/Jersey area and people questioned my desire to leave the area. Even though I ended up at Jeff, I still wanted to give other areas a serious look and when I was asked I showed them that I had applied to the entire country, from California to Philadelphia. Let them know that you are seriously considering them. After all, you put in all that effort to get there, so you are serious.

Always be honest with them. But be well-thought out. Don’t rock the boat, but definitely share your thoughts on what you are looking for in a program. Another nice technique is to read about the place, know kind of what they may be looking for, and shape your views to help you show that there are certain things about you that would make you fit in there. I learned so much during the interview process, that I realized I wasn’t entirely sure what I wanted in a program at the start. So don’t eliminate yourself from contention by giving them the idea that you don’t like their approach. I know it may be difficult to realize now, but you probably don’t have as firm a grasp on the approach you want to take as you might think.

How did you prepare for your interviews? Program websites and anything they sent me in the mail. Schedule a few programs that you are pretty sure you won’t want to go to (b/c of location, etc) early on, so that you will have some practice. By the end you will have answers memorized for every question, but you want to be smooth on the “big days.” Do at least two “practice” interviews, I did two. But remember it’s competitive and a small community, so never take an interview day lightly.

Did you do an away rotation in your specialty field? Yes, one. I picked an away rotation in the most competitive program that was in the geographic area that I wanted to end up in. It is a necessity in neurosurgery. It is important to get multiple letters from Chairmen and this is where you'll get your second (the first comes from your home program). It gave me a tremendous advantage when being considered for interviews and then the match.

Additional comments/advice: It is going to be hard to find rotations here at Jeff that will be understanding of the fact that you are going to need to do ~14-15 interviews, each requiring about 2 days. Neurosurgery, for some ridiculous reason, doesn't count as an inpatient sub-I either, even though you'll be working more hours and be in the hospital everyday for a month. So scheduling is going to be a problem. You probably have to take one month off (I recommend November – that's when the majority of your interviews will be). The other interviews you have to squeeze in and work with the different departments. Additionally, you may have to drop/add until it drives you crazy. This aspect is one of the hardest parts of the process.

Programs will contact you as the match grows near and want to feel you out as to where you might be interested in going. If there is ONE program that you ARE SURE that you are going to rank #1, then it does not hurt to tell that program. I would wait until interviews are nearly over before doing that. Do not tell more than one program that you are ranking them #1. Tell all other places that you are "excited" that they are interested, you enjoyed your time there, you are ranking them very highly, or something to that effect. If a program contacts you and they are showing interest, I think you should send the resident an e-mail saying you are interested, or thank them, or something along those lines. It's polite and you don't want to offend anyone.

Send thank you notes. I sent them to the chair and the residency program director if he/she was different than the chair. It's not necessary to send one to every person that interviewed you.

If something of yours gets published or you win an award, etc. during the interview season. I would send a cover letter and a copy of the article or some other proof that you achieved this new honor. It's also a nice chance to remind people that you are still interested. But don't start sending stuff out every week. I had two pieces published, one in basic science and the other a letter to the editor of a good journal, I sent them out together.

You want these programs to know that you are motivated and hard working and that neurosurgery is your life, but you also don't want them to think you're crazy. Don't go out of your way to be overly impressive, or kiss-up, just be yourself. I heard this line at three different interviews (I swear), "basically, today is about making sure you aren't crazy" (one attending said "a maniac")

May future applicants in your specialty contact you for advice? Email: Of course.

peter.amenta@jefferson.edu. I'll be at Jefferson for another 7 years. I look forward to seeing all of you on the service. Good luck to everyone.
