Writing a Personal Statement

The personal statement can be difficult to write and a source of much frustration for students, but it is a useful tool to give the selection committee some idea of your background, goals and character. Think of this as an opportunity to highlight your strong points. A good personal statement should focus on your medical career objectives - your specialty choice and aspirations. It should not be a rehash of why you came to medical school or a summary of your CV, but rather a succinct statement of your career goals that reflects your personality and style.

Your personal statement should include:

- An explanation of why you want to go into your chosen specialty and the characteristics or points that attracted you. If there is a particular event that led to your interest, describe it.
- Clinical activities, research or special projects that solidified your interest. You want the reader to see your commitment to the specialty and the profession.
- Your personal characteristics that make you well suited for the specialty, and the strengths you can offer the program. Your self-assessment results may be helpful to you in describing the attributes that you bring to the program and specialty.
- What you are looking for in a program, clinically and academically (making sure you are sending it to programs that can meet those needs).
- Your future plans and goals within the specialty.

There may be situations where a unique personal statement focused on a single residency program may be in order (ex: if you have done a sub-internship at your first choice location or did research as an undergraduate with a faculty member at a particular program). With your advisor, think about strategy given your credentials and the places you want to apply. Your personal statement should be succinct, yet provide the reader with an overview of who you are and where you are headed.

Tips for writing your personal statement:

- Keep it to one page, neatly typed with proper grammar and composition.
- Avoid abbreviations.
- Avoid repetitive sentence structure.
- Get help - have your advisor and student affairs dean read it over.
- Give yourself adequate time to prepare a well-written statement.
- Read it aloud or have someone read it aloud to you to make sure it flows and makes sense.
- Be error-free - proof your work for grammar, spelling, and typographical errors.

Your Student Affairs Office may have sample personal statements that you can review for additional ideas. Have someone else read over your personal statement to roof your work. Remember that in the early part of the residency selection process, the personal statement is the closest thing your reviewers have to knowing you personally. A good personal statement won't necessarily get you the position, but a bad one can torpedo your candidacy.

The last step in preparing your residency application is Getting Letters of Recommendation.

Back to Getting into Residency