

# What Would I Tell My Intern-Year Self?



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The preliminary year before dermatology training can be the source of much anxiety. However, there are aspects of it that can be rewarding and even fun. Herein, I present some of my own experiences as well as those of colleagues to help relieve stress and hopefully focus on the positive aspects of this busy year and the transition into dermatology training.

*Cutis.* 2018;102:E6-E7.

The training path to dermatology can seem interminable. From getting good grades in college to seeking out the “right” extracurricular activities and cramming for the MCAT, just getting into medical school was a huge challenge. In medical school, you may recognize the same chaos as you begin to prepare for US Medical Licensing Examination Step 1, try to volunteer, and publish original research. Dermatology is undeniably a competitive specialty. The 2018 data released by the National Resident Match Program (also called The Match) showed that only 83% of 412 US seniors who applied were matched to dermatology.<sup>1</sup> The average Step 1 score for those who matched was 249 versus 241 for those who did not match. In addition, they had an average of 5.2 research experiences, 9.1 volunteer experiences, and 49.1 were members of Alpha Omega Alpha.<sup>1</sup>

After studying and working to meet these targets, it is not surprising that the transition to residency is a big change. As a dermatology preliminary intern, or “prelim,” our experience differs compared to other specialties, as other interns are jumping into their area of practice right away.

During my intern year, I had a tremendous amount of anxiety about 2 things: (1) being a subpar medical intern and (2) being unprepared for the beginning of my dermatology residency. This anxiety drove me to read a tremendous amount of medical and dermatological literature in an effort to do everything. Although hindsight is always

20/20, I will share some thoughts of my own as well as some from friends and colleagues.

First, enjoy intern year. I know that may sound ridiculous, but there were many aspects of intern year that I loved! When your pager beeps, it’s for YOU! You are no longer a subintern, running every decision past your intern or explaining your student status to the patients! Proudly introduce yourself as Dr. So-and-So. You earned it! I loved the camaraderie of working with my co-interns and senior residents. Going through the challenges of intern year together is a deep bonding experience, and I absolutely made lifelong friendships. It also does not hurt that I met my boyfriend (now husband), which has changed my life in a big way.

When it comes to learning internal medicine, pediatrics, or surgery (depending on your intern year), prepare for rounds, read about your patients, and pay attention in Grand Rounds. You can even consider taking the dermatologic cases that may be on your team, just for fun. I am always grateful for my internal medicine knowledge when managing complex medical dermatology patients and rounding on our consultation service on the wards. However, do not burden yourself with excessive studying. Enjoy your time off: spend it with family and friends or rediscover a hobby that has been neglected while you have been working toward your achievements.

When it comes to learning dermatology, do not rush it! You have 3 years and a ton of studying ahead of you! You will learn all of it. When July 1 of your first year of dermatology finally starts, immerse yourself in this new world:

- Attend conferences. Even if they are on topics you might not be interested in—from cosmetics to psoriasis—they provide a real-world perspective and often have great lecturers sharing their knowledge.
- Get involved. There are many dermatologic societies to take part in, and dues are waived or reduced when you sign up as a resident. Many of them provide

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The author reports no conflict of interest.

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great resources from study materials to journals, and they are always a great way to network when there are events.

- Volunteer. Many of the dermatologic societies sponsor volunteer events such as skin cancer screenings. It can be a fun way to network while also giving back to the community.
- Spend time figuring out what you really enjoy. This step may seem self-evident, but after many years of fulfilling the necessary criteria to get into medical school and residency, it can be habitual to start fulfilling the same criteria all over again. Explore all aspects of dermatology and see what truly interests you. Consider how you expect your life after residency to be and think what learning opportunities might be helpful down the road. Reach out to attendings you would like to work with,

both in dermatology and in other specialties. I personally enjoyed working in wound and oncology clinics, learning how other specialties approach clinical dilemmas that we see in dermatology.

As I embark on my final year of dermatology residency, I am truly grateful for the wisdom that has been shared with me on this journey. Many people have provided key pieces of information that have helped shape my training and my plans for the future, and I hope that sharing it will help others!

#### REFERENCE

1. National Resident Matching Program, Charting Outcomes in the Match: U.S. Allopathic Seniors, 2018. Washington, DC: National Resident Matching Program; 2018. <http://www.nrmp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Charting-Outcomes-in-the-Match-2018-Seniors.pdf>. Accessed September 20, 2018.