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When you get ready to apply for residency, which could happen as early as your third year of med school, there are realtyto main components to the application process: submitting your application packet to various programs and completing the required interviews for the programs interested in you. But how exactly do you make sure you get that call for an interview? One way is by including an original, memorable residency personal statement as part of your application packet. Residency Prerequisites Before we get to the personal statement, though, lets look at the steps required for you to be eligible for residency. Step 1: Receive Your Degree Although youll possibly start applying for residency during the fall semester of your third year at medical school, before you can be accepted, you must have your degree. It doesnt matter if your application looks great and your interview blows the minds of the residency selection committee; if you dont receive your M.D. or D.O., you wont be eligible for residency. Step 2: Pass the Examinations In the U.S., youre required to pass an exam before you can become licensed to practice medicine. Traditionally, students have taken theUSMLE(United States Medical Licensing Examination), but some schools now require you to take theCOMLEX(Comprehensive Osteopathic Medical Licensing Examination) either instead of the USMLE or in addition to it. For foreign students, if youre a foreign student hoping to be accepted within the U.S., there are a few additional requirements. These are, but are not limited to, being certified by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG), obtaining a legal VISA that gives you the right to work in the United States, procuring additional letters of recommendation from U.S.-based providers and more. Applying for a Residency What Youll Need As youre putting together your residency application packet, youll be responsible for gathering: Your completed applicationYour residency personal statementYour letters of recommendation There are a few other things that must be included in your application packet, but your medical school will handle those items. They include: Your complete and sealed transcriptsA copy of your MSPE (Medical School Performance Evaluation)Your licensing exam transcript Once youve gotten your half of the documents ready to submit, your medical school should take care of the rest. Its important to fill out your application completely and accurately, as every bit of information included in the packet will be verified by multiple agencies. The ERAS: What It Is and How to Apply To apply for residency with almost all programs in the United States, youll be required to fill out an application through theElectronic Residency Application Service (ERAS). The ERAS was created and is maintained by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). It makes applying for residency much easier because you only have to fill out one application at a centralized location. That application then gets sent to all the different programs youre interested in becoming a part of during your residency. If you used the Common App as an undergraduate, you already have an idea of what the ERAS is like. Unlike the Common App, though, theres one really great thing about the ERAS that many other centralized applications dont include: the ability to submit multiple personal statements. Why Submit Multiple Personal Statements You may be wondering why youd want to write more than one personal statement when writing one is stressful enough. The simple answer is that writing multiple personal statements gives you the opportunity to personalize your statements for the specific program to which youre applying. For example, if youM applying for a pediatric residency in Brooklyn, you can write your personal statement specifically about why you chose that specialty and that geographic location. Additionally, if you also apply for an internal medicine residency in Washington, D.C., you can write a second personal statement outlining your reasons for that choice as well. ERAS Portal There arefour main sections of the ERAS application portal. Section 1: MYERAS This is the part of the ERAS thats your responsibility. Using MYERAS, youll complete the centralized application, submit your required documentation and personal statements and select the programs to which youre applying. When it comes to filling out the ERAS, this is the only section youll personally have to complete. Section 2: DWS The DWS, or Deans Office WorkStation, is where the designated person in your Deans office will submit what s/he is required to submit on your behalf. This will include your transcripts and performance evaluations. Section 3: LoRP The LoRP is the Letters of Recommendation Portal. Youll direct people whose agreed to provide you with letters of recommendation to this location and have them submit their recommendation letters through the portal. Section 4: PDWS The PDWS, short for Program Directors WorkStation, is where the programs youve applied to will receive and review their incoming applications. Help with the ERAS In addition to having everything you need for all your prospective programs in one place, another great thing about the ERAS is that the website provides you with a lot of great resources to help ensure you get everything done correctly and submitted in a timely manner. Theres anApplicant Worksheetthat allows you to see everything the application asks before you even start working on it. Theres also aUser Guide, anApplicant Checklist, aFAAQ Sectionandan Application Timelineto keep you on track. Writing Your Residency Personal Statement Although each residency personal statement you write should be different depending on the program to which youre applying, there are some things youll remain familiar with, even the format. The length and overall format of the statement. The ERAS allows you to use 28,000 characters (including spaces and punctuation marks) to complete your residency personal statement. This generally translates to about five to seven pages in length.Dontuse all 28,000 characters for your statements. That is entirely too long. You have to be considerate of the time of the person reading your statement. S/he likely has thousands of personal statements to read through, and s/he doesnt want to spend too much time on any one statement. If possible, you should keep your personal statements to about 3,500 to 5,000 characters. This translates to about a page and a half for your statement. Thats a good length that should give you enough room to say everything you need to say without rambling on about non-essential information. Standard Residency Personal Statement Format The format of your statements will also be quite similar. You dont have to worry about choosing your font, font size, or anything like that. With the ERAS, youll be using an embedded plain text box to type your personal statement. The only formatting options available to you will be: Italics, Bold, Strikethrough and Underline(Con, Left or Right Align)Bullet PointsNumbered ListsAdd Embedded HyperlinkIncrease or Decrease Indent Beyond those items, you wont be able to change anything in the formatting, but yourcontentformat is important. You should have a short introduction of three to five sentences, several body paragraphs, and a conclusion of about three to six sentences. The information you put into those paragraphs will depend largely on what exactly youve writing in your personal statement. Red Flags of Residency Personal Statement to Avoid Theres are definitely some things you want to avoid while writing your personal statement for your residency application. Lets call them the Dont List. Dont Use All 28,000 Characters Weve already discussed this, but it warrants being said twice. No one wants to read seven pages worth of a personal statement. Absolutely notuse all of the provided characters for your personal statement. Dont Send the Same Statement to Every Program This is another one that weve touched on already, but it, too, is worth repeating. The reasons youre applying for various programs need to be different. Dont Repeat Yourself Dont use the same statement over and over again. You should have a unique statement for each program to which youre applying. Dont Give Them Actual Reasons for Your Interest, Theyre going to assume youve just desperately applying everywhere you can in hopes of getting an acceptance. That doesnt look good in a prospective residency candidate. Dont Spend a Lot of Time Talking About Why You Want to Be a Doctor By the time you get to the residency portion of your career youre already a doctor. Why you decided to become one is kind of a moot point. This is one place where people often get tripped up. Your residency application isnt a med school application. By this point, youve already proven you want to be a doctor by putting in all the work to become one. Why you didnt it doesnt matter. You were obviously motivated to succeed. Dont waste precious characters rehashing your reasons for going into medicine. Dont Be Generic Be specific about why youve chosen pediatrics, internal medicine, surgery or whatever program youve chosen to pursue in your residency. The person reading your statement doesnt want to hear that youve chosen pediatrics because you just love babies! Youre an adult with a medical degree. Use all those years of education and be specific about why youve made the choices youve made. Dont Be Overly Dramatic You want your personal statement to be interesting and memorable, but youdont want it to sound like the first page of a movie script. You dont have to set the scene dramatically with overused and cliched stories about Patient X lying on the bed, blood rushing down his head and barely conscious as I walked up and took his hand, looked into his eyes and told him I would save his life. Just dont do this. Dont Include Anything Considered Too Controversial Your personal statement isnt the place for activism. Dont get into topics such as pro-life vs. pro-choice or why you think cloning is a sin against God. Its okay to mention that youre a regular church member, but you dont have to shy away from religion altogether, but you dont want to include a strong stance you hold on something thats known to be polarizing. 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love of biologic systems, that drew me to medicine.Roger leads with details like roofs leaky from hail storms and time-worn signs of hail damage that make his previous career in construction like this. He indicates the hundreds of hours he spent learning to examine subtle signs of roof damage in a manner that suggests, without stating it outright, both the kind of learner Roger would be as a dermatology resident and the transferable qualities he gained from his work and life experiences.The last line of the paragraph, which helps anchor the reader in Rogers motivations from the beginning, describes how Rogers interest came to be. This thesis makes it much easier to navigate the essay and helps Roger compellingly articulate who he is and why he has chosen to apply for dermatology.Body section 1: SpecialtyIn medical school, I serendipitously found the specialty within which I wanted to apply this passion after accidentally dumping a bag of mulched poison ivy on my head. The resulting rash was painful but interesting and sparked a curiosity in cutaneous manifestations of disease that later led me to a dermatology elective. There, I was impressed by the dermatologists keen eye for detail, and I found the diagnostic challenge and the detail-driven expertise to be both fascinating and rewarding.Each new rash I saw was reminiscent of inspecting leaky roofs and I wanted to emulate my new mentors, who had developed the ability to diagnose and treat skin disease based on the subtle cues they saw. Such was the case when a grizzled farmer from a distant rural community with infrequent follow-up ascribed a sore on his arm to a specific trauma. Despite this history, the dermatologist recognized some subtle and suspicious features, prompting a biopsy that later showed invasive squamous cell carcinoma. In addition to the dermatologists diagnostic acumen, it was her relationship with the patient and her understanding of his community, values, and risk factors that allowed her to guide this patient to a better outcome.In this section, Roger emphasizes his interest in dermatology and develops the idea he introduced in his opening paragraph: being attuned to subtle signs of damage. Roger finds kinship in the dermatologists keen eye for detail, relishes the diagnostic challenge, and emphasizes detail-driven expertiseall qualities he previously expressed about himself as a roofer and which he is now connecting to dermatology as a field.In the second specialty paragraph, Roger turns his attention to a mentor to tell a specific anecdote that demonstrates his clear understanding about what dermatology entails. With his point about the visual and attentive elements of dermatology made, Roger transitions to describing the patient relationship toward the end of the second paragraph. The understanding of his community, values, and risk factors that allowed her to guide this patient to a better outcome sets Roger up to describe how he shares this awareness as well.Finally, the specificity of the mulched poison ivy, its resulting rash, and the grizzled rural farmer makes this firmly Rogers and no one elses.Body section 2: AdvocacyIn medical school I have enjoyed caring for those who, for cultural, insurance, or geographic reasons, have difficulty receiving care. After one shift in my inpatient pediatrics rotation, I brought my guitar to play for a Latino boy who was dying from leukemia and made his parents my favorite recipe for chile verde with pork. Although I couldnt offer any more to them medically, I hoped to aid the fear and disconnection they had expressed with the unfamiliar environment now surrounding them. The connection made in that moment helped ease their suffering and fostered a better union between the treatment team and patient.Multiple studies have suggested that outcomes for dermatologic conditions tend to be poorer in certain demographics. As part of my own research, I have begun investigating these disparities. This has included a research project where we evaluated the effects of social and demographic factors on melanoma outcomes. One finding that spoke to me was that outcomes tended to be poorer in areas with fewer dermatologists. Having grown up in a small town and having completed medical school in a more rural area, I feel a special connection to these communities. I hope to continue to engage in research that better elucidates these disparities to supply better care to these populations.In this section, Roger returns to the advocacy he mentioned in his introduction. He keeps it unique by describing a specific interaction with a single family and even mentions his favorite recipe, which gives the body paragraphs a touch of his personality.The cultural angle helps remind the reader of the ways Roger has been interested in culturally-specific service since his days in roofing, when he advocated on behalf of Spanish-speaking clients.Finally, Roger gives context to the research on his CV by showing how his preference for the underserved isnt merely an ideological commitment. Rather, Rogers attraction to dermatology dovetails with his passion for connecting with the underserved because his research credentials back it up. Even his upbringing in a different country finds a parallel in the rural environment where he hopes to practice now. The combination of details makes this section uniquely Roger and deepens our sense of who he is.ConclusionIn my career I intend to apply my maturity and honesty. Dont make excuses; do take ownership of the problem and explain how youve learned and grown from your mistakes.If there is a legal issue in your past, the ERAS application contains legal disclosure fields in which you can discuss the incident. Its typically not necessary to also address the issue in your personal statement unless it played a formative role in your journey towards your specialty.The above are our general recommendations; however, given the many nuances and gray areas that tend to accompany red flags, its usually a good idea to discuss how to handle them with a trusted advisor in your specialty.Should I tailor my personal statement to specific residency programs?Generally speaking, its not necessary to tailor your personal statement to each program to which you apply. That said, ERAS does allow you to upload as many personal statements as you wish, so it is possible to send different versions of your personal statement to different programs. Before you consider doing so, keep in mind that its probably not realistic to send a customized personal statement to every program that youre applying to. Instead, you might do so for, say, your top three programs. Another approach could involve creating two different versions of your personal statement to send out as you choose. For instance, you might have one version geared towards research-heavy programs and one geared towards community-oriented programs. Or, perhaps a few programs on your list are in your home city and the rest are located elsewhere. You could then create a personal statement for the hometown programs that includes a few sentences reflecting your geographical tie and why its important to your medical career (e.g. Having grown up in a medically underserved community in Romulus, my lifelong goal has been to improve access to healthcare for the citizens of Wayne County).In any case, you should only tailor your personal statement to reflect genuine, well-founded reasons for your interest in a program. Because tailored personal statements are neither the norm nor the expectation, half-baked attempts to demonstrate fit will be noticeable. (Note: We should mention that the one situation that always calls for multiple personal statements is if youre applying to more than one specialty.)

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