

Tips for Interviewing Residency Applicants

by

Janine C. Edwards, Ph.D
Professor Emerita of Medical Humanities
Texas A & M University

Marianne Currie, PhD
Terrance P. Wade, MD
Donald L. Kaminski, MD

Introduction

Interviewing applicants for residency is different from interviewing patients. Interviewing patients requires directive techniques. The questions are specific and highly patterned to elicit specific information. Open-ended questions are more useful in interviewing applicants for residency programs.

Types of Interview

The one-on-one interview is frequently used in residency programs. Several one-on-one interviews will be reliable only if all interviewers are evaluating the same competencies. Furthermore, the reliability will be higher if all interviewers ask the same questions. The group interview (one interviewer with several applicants) is useful, especially in informal settings, such as lunch. The panel interview (several interviewers with one applicant) generally yields more reliable results than one-on-one interviews. In the panel interview, one person should lead in asking the questions; the other interviewers can contribute questions or comments during discussion. Each interviewer writes their own evaluation.

It is advisable to consult a legal expert about the legal and illegal aspects of interviewing.

Prior to the Interview

Review the applicant's file.

- Study the cognitive aspects of the file: Grade point average, board scores, etc. Plan to question the applicant only about any inconsistencies in these aspects of the record.
- Formulate questions about non-cognitive aspects based on the competences of the program.
- Arrange at least 30 to 45 minutes for the interview. Less time yields less than worthwhile information.

The Interview

1. Conduct the interview in a pleasant, comfortable room (free from distractions).
2. Greet the applicant by name pleasantly and warmly. Introduce yourself. Thank the applicant for coming.

3. Begin with a few minutes of small talk to create rapport.
4. Give the applicant an overview of the interview. This statement should let the applicant know that you will ask questions and explore those in some depth, that you will give information about the program, and finally that the applicant can ask you questions afterward.
5. Encourage the applicant to talk by asking "open questions", keep the conversation flowing by asking "moderate -focus questions," and probe with "closed questions."
6. Actively listen and listen to understand the applicant. Observe nonverbal behavior as well as what the applicant says.

Closing the Interview

1. Be sure you have adequately assessed all the competencies on the interview evaluation form.
2. Give information about the program.
3. Receive and answer questions the applicant may have.

After the interview

1. Complete the interview evaluation form.
2. Complete any notes you made during the interview.

References:

Rae, Leslie. (1988). The skills of interviewing: A guide for managers and trainers. England: Gower Publishing Company.

Swann, W. S. (1989). Swann's how to pick the right people program. New York: John Wiley & Sons.