

What You Need to Know for the 2021 Fellowship Match

BRIAN WOLF, MD, MS, FAAOS, AND LISA K. CANNADA, MD, FAAOS

▶ Along with the rest of medical education, the COVID-19 pandemic will impact the 2021 Orthopaedic Fellowship Match. Those planning to apply for the 2021 Match should read this article.

The Board of Specialty Societies (BOS) Fellowship Committee recently had its biannual meeting. The Fellowship Committee has representatives from all subspecialties participating in the Match. Hand surgery participates in the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP); that multidisciplinary match includes applicants from general and plastic surgery. All other orthopaedic specialties participate in a single process using the SF Match. See Table 1 for the 2021 Match calendar.

The BOS Fellowship Committee and the AAOS Board of Directors have formally recommended that *all* fellowship interviews be virtual this year. This was done to ensure a level playing field for all applicants and programs given the uncertainty of COVID-19 outbreaks in the coming year. That means applicants must learn how to shine in virtual interviews.

More than ever before, this year's applicants must be prepared for the virtual interview process in order to make an impression on fellowship programs and gather critical information about those programs to make decisions regarding their ultimate rank lists. The applicants need to be prepared to ask all questions during interviews to learn about programs and get a "feel," despite not being able to visit in person. (See article on page 36 that discusses how to prepare for a virtual interview.) Likewise, fellowship programs will be tasked with demonstrating what their programs have to offer, highlighting their faculties and facilities and educating applicants on their locations. All specialty societies have agreed to an established fellowship match rule that in-person program visits, either pre- or post-interview, to gain information or an advantage should not be permitted.

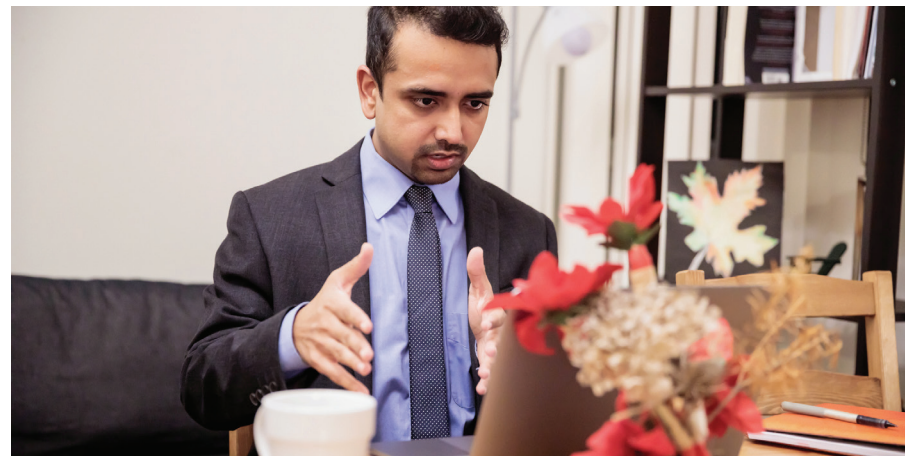
Until you apply through SF Match, you may not realize that the orthopaedic

fellowship match has a Code of Conduct. This was originally formulated more than seven years ago and was formally revised in 2019 with input from residents and fellowship programs. When you apply, you sign the Code of Conduct to ensure an equitable match process for all. For instance, the Code of Conduct expects programs to extend interviews in a timely manner after applications are received. Also, to be consistent and fair to all applicants, programs are not to communicate with applicants after interviews (unless there are program changes that could affect decisions), so as not to create false expectations or place undue pressure on applicants.

An applicant is expected not to cancel within two weeks of an interview date, as that often causes a ripple effect of other applicants getting invited on short notice, potentially leading to further cancellations. An applicant is not to communicate with a program after an interview for any reason. Once the match occurs, the resultant contract becomes a binding commitment.

Throughout the years, there have been several articles about the orthopaedic fellowship match. The statistics regarding the match are always made available to the residents and programs. It is known that, for most specialties, there are more applicants than positions. But in the end, most specialties have open spots. It is customary for applicants to apply to a large number (15 to 30 or more) of programs and to complete at least 10 interviews. In the 2020 fellowship match, 97 percent of domestic fellowship applicants matched into a fellowship program, with only 3 percent not matching. In 2019, 98 percent of domestic applicants matched into fellowship positions, and the vast majority of those who went unmatched scrambled into a fellowship vacancy.

The 2021 Match is unique for being all virtual, and we encourage applicants and programs alike to use judgment and restraint in the application and interview process. For applicants, we



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recommend researching and learning about programs in advance. Applicants should reflect on their goals and desired training environments and carefully analyze factors such as case load, faculty, type of training, research, and number of fellows when checking the box to apply to any program. Programs are expected to have up-to-date information on their websites, which is more important this year than ever before.

Applicants also need to take a serious look at themselves, their qualifications, and what they have done to make themselves competitive since starting residency. Everyone applying to each specialty may want to apply to the "top" program with the most widely known faculty and high-level name recognition, but applicants should realize that not everyone can get an interview there. Based on historical data on applicant matching, domestic applicants should consider applying to no more than 10 to

15 programs and accept no more than eight to 10 interviews. Remember that virtual interviews are not the same and take special efforts on the part of both the programs and applicants. The statistics are in favor of domestic applicants for fellowships—with the overwhelming majority matching.

To the applicants: Relax, learn about the programs, apply prudently, and brush up on selling yourself to a program through Zoom.

Brian Wolf, MD, MS, FAAOS, is chair of the AAOS BOS Fellowship Committee and a professor in the Department of Orthopedics and Rehabilitation at the University of Iowa.

Lisa K. Cannada, MD, FAAOS, is a member of the AAOS *Now* Editorial Board, head of the AAOS *Now* Diversity Task Force, and an orthopaedic trauma surgeon living in Jacksonville, Fla. She is affiliated with the Hughston Clinic and Novant Health.

Specialty	Match system	Applicant registration begins	Rank list deadline for applicants and programs	Results released to applicants and programs	Post-match vacancies posted	Training position starts
Adult reconstruction, trauma, foot and ankle, sports, spine, pediatrics, tumor, shoulder and elbow	SF Match	Aug. 3	April 13, 2021	April 20, 2021	April 22, 2021	Aug. 1, 2022
Hand	National Resident Matching Program	Sept. 16	May 5, 2021	May 19, 2021	—	Aug. 1, 2022

Table 1 2020–2021 match timeline for 2022–2023 fellowship position
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