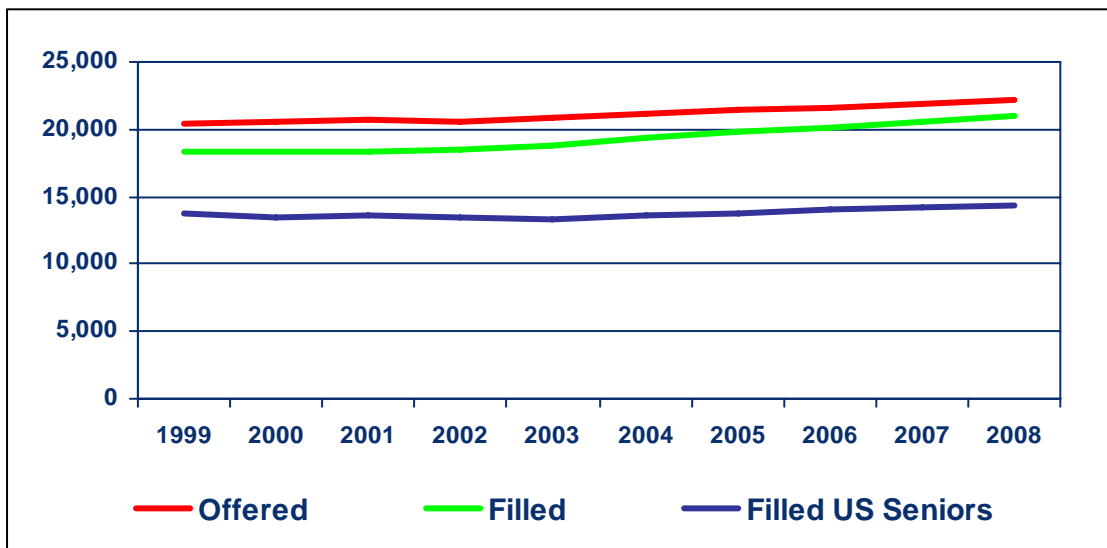


INTRODUCTION

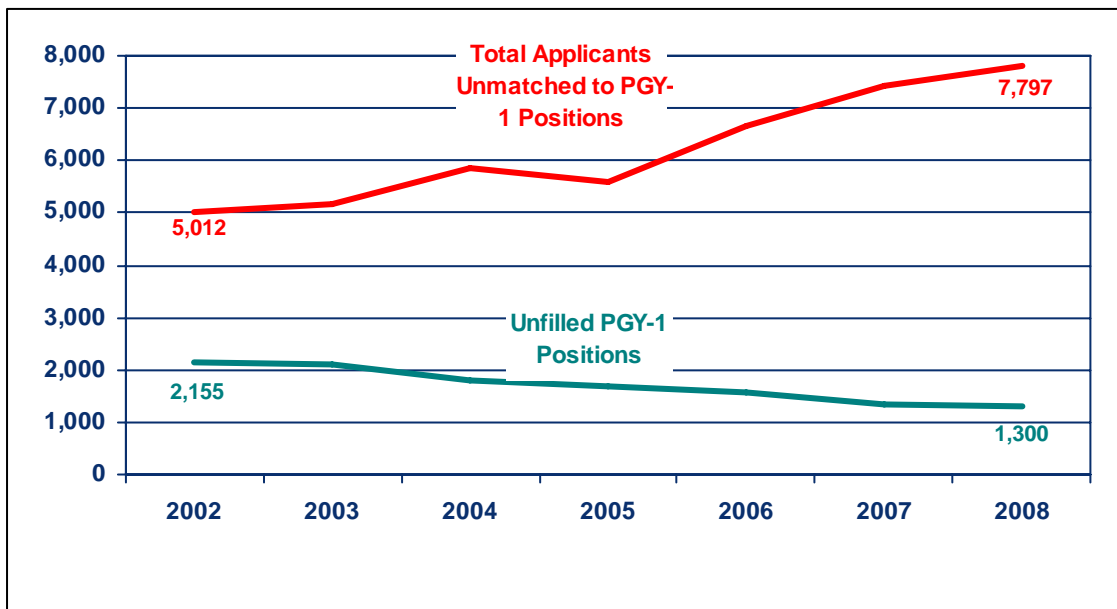
The National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) and the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) have partnered to bring changes to the “Scramble” for unfilled positions” that occurs during Match Week of the Main Residency Match. A joint task force has been established, with representation from medical school student affairs deans, residency program directors, and recent graduates of U.S. and international medical schools. Background information and the proposed changes are summarized below. Comments should be directed to NRMP Executive Director Mona M. Signer ([msigner@aamc.org](mailto:m signer@aamc.org)) or AAMC Senior Director Henry Sondheimer (hsondheimer@aamc.org). The deadline for receipt of comments is March 1, 2009. Changes would occur no earlier than the 2011 Main Residency Match.

BACKGROUND

Over the past several years, the competition for residency positions has heightened. In the 2008 Main Residency Match, more than 4,000 graduate medical education programs offered 22,240 first-year and 2,826 second-year positions. The chart below shows the ten-year trend in the numbers of first-year positions offering and filled:



The heightened competition has extended to the Scramble. More than 35,000 applicants registered for the Match; of those, 28,737 submitted rank order lists of programs, and 20,940 matched to first-year positions. Note below the growing disparity between the numbers of unmatched applicants and unfilled first-year positions.



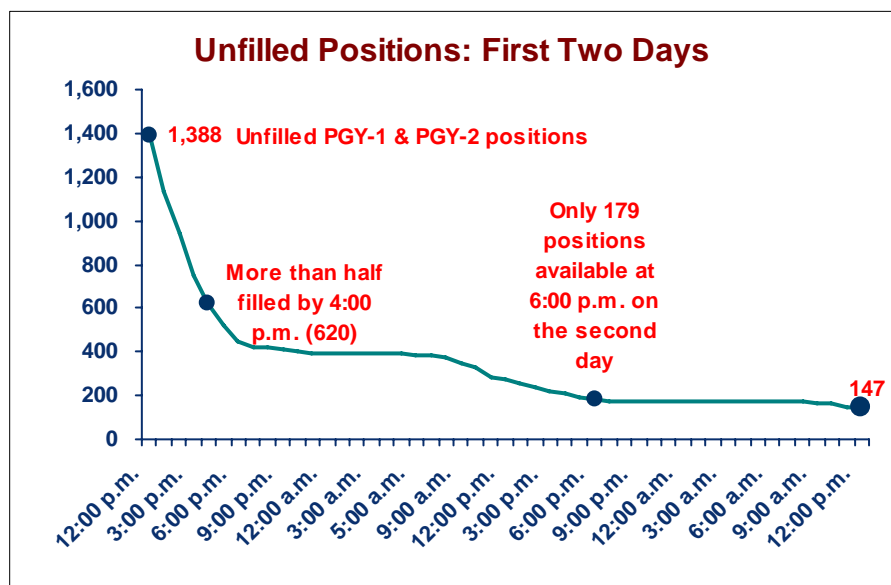
These charts do not fully depict the competitive nature of the Scramble. Many graduates of international medical schools (IMGs) do not submit rank order lists of programs; rather, they register for the Match to obtain the List of Unfilled Programs released during Match Week. The NRMP calculates that nearly 13,000 applicants competed for only 1,300 first-year positions. The numbers are even more striking when one considers that more than 600 of the first-year positions were in preliminary programs, which many applicants view as undesirable because they do not lead to specialty training.

THE “SCRAMBLE” FOR UNFILLED POSITIONS

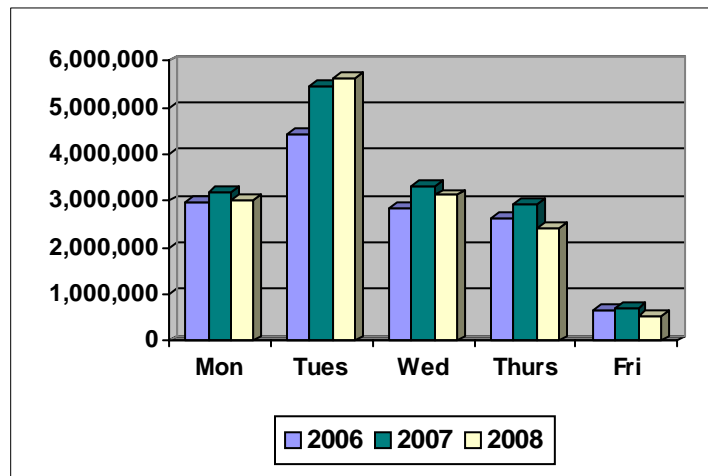
During Match Week, the NRMP releases the Match outcome based upon the following schedule:

MATCH WEEK SCHEDULE		
Monday	11:30 a.m.	School Unmatched Seniors Report
	12:00 p.m.	Applicant “Did I Match?”
	12:00 p.m.	Regional Match Statistics
Tuesday	11:30 a.m.	Program “Did I Fill?”
	11:30 a.m.	Unfilled positions pdf for schools
	12:00 p.m.	Unfilled positions on Web
Wednesday	6:00 a.m.	School match notification letters
	6:00 a.m.	School match results
	6:00 a.m.	Applicant choices by specialty
	12:00 p.m.	Program Roster of Matched Applicants
Thursday	12:00 p.m.	Match Day ceremonies
	1:00 p.m.	Applicant “Where Did I Match?”
Monday	12:00 p.m.	Match Results by Ranked Applicant Match Outcome for All Programs

The “Scramble” officially begins on Tuesday at noon eastern time, when the NRMP posts the List of Unfilled Programs to its web site, and continues until noon on Thursday, when U.S. medical schools hold their Match Day ceremonies. Although the unfilled positions remain posted until May 1 in the NRMP Registration, Ranking, and Results (R3) System, few are available after the first 48 hours:



The chart below shows there were 5.5 million “hits” on the NRMP Registration, Ranking, and Results (R3) System on Tuesday of Match Week, when the Scramble begins. The average time to serve the List of Unfilled Programs was less than 1 second.



Data from the Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS) corroborate the NRMP figures. Between noon and 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, almost 80,000 MyERAS logins occurred, and more than 8,700 applicants sent applications. Below are the numbers of applications submitted for the top seven specialties:

Specialty	Applications Transmitted	Mean Number of Applications Per Unfilled Program
Anesthesiology	2,055	128
Emergency Medicine	2,240	186
Family Medicine	39,549	403
Internal Medicine	23,372	292
Pediatrics	6,821	170
Psychiatry	4,779	177
General Surgery	11,727	86

These numbers understate the magnitude of the problem, however. If 8,700 applicants used ERAS, the remainder of the estimated 13,000 participating in the Scramble sent their applications individually or through commercial services, clogging telephones, faxes, and email inboxes.

SCRAMBLE WORK GROUP

The Scramble Work Group established by the NRMP and AAMC identified several problems:

- No organization has assumed stewardship of the Scramble.
- The Scramble lacks the trust, transparency, and integrity inherent in the Match.
- Applicants must make career decisions in very short timeframes, often hours.
- There is no separation between application, interview, and appointment.
- There is no consistent or orderly process for applying to programs during the Scramble.
- No rules govern applicant and program behavior.

The Work Group agreed the NRMP is the logical organization to assume ownership of the Scramble because it releases and manages the dynamic List of Unfilled Positions and controls which applicants have access to it. The Work Group also believes the NRMP can establish the same level of trust and integrity in the Scramble that exists in the Match.

The following principles would serve as the foundation of a new “managed” Scramble:

- Release unmatched applicant and unfilled program information simultaneously
- Mandate a “time out” period during which unmatched applicants could send applications but no offers could be made
- Require applicants to submit applications and programs to accept applications only through ERAS
- Require programs to offer positions during Match Week only through the R3 System
- Add functionality to the R3 System to allow programs to offer unfilled positions on the basis of preference lists submitted by the programs
- Require applicants to accept or reject their offer(s) within a specific timeframe; offers not accepted or rejected expire
- Create within the R3 System a binding electronic “handshake” when an applicant accepts a position
- Delete positions from the dynamic List of Unfilled Programs once an offer has been accepted.
- Continue offering a program’s unfilled positions in order of preference until all positions are filled or the preference list has been exhausted
- Expand the scope of the NRMP Match Participation Agreement to include the Scramble, ending on Friday of Match Week
- Impose sanctions for improper behavior

Offers made and accepted during Match Week would be binding under the Match Participation Agreement; accordingly, only applicants eligible to begin training on July 1 in the year of the Match would be allowed to participate. Prior to Match Week, the NRMP—using the R3 System—would require medical school deans to recertify the status of their senior students. In addition, the NRMP would exchange data with the ECFMG to recertify the status of IMGs. Ineligible applicants, even if unmatched, would not have access to the List of Unfilled Programs. On the Friday before Match Week, applicants who were ineligible to participate in the Match when the matching algorithm was run would be notified of their eligibility for the Scramble.

The table below shows the current and proposed Match Week schedules. Unmatched applicant and unfilled program information would be released simultaneously at noon on Monday, and ERAS would open in Scramble mode so applicants could begin sending applications. No offers could be made or accepted for 48 hours, allowing unfilled programs an opportunity to review all applications and to interview applicants by telephone. Programs would be required to submit their preference lists by 11:00 a.m. Wednesday, and the R3 System would begin extending offers at noon. Applicants could receive multiple offers, and would receive notification via email and by logging in to the R3 System. Offers would be valid for a two-hour window, and the R3 System would continue extending offers every two hours, with the final set valid until 8:00 p.m. The R3 System would begin extending offers again at 10:00 a.m. Thursday and Friday morning and continue throughout the day. Program directors would be able to monitor their preference lists throughout the Scramble and add candidates to the bottom of the list, if necessary. Match Day would be moved from Thursday to Friday.

Day	Current Schedule	Proposed Schedule
Monday Before Match Week		NRMP sends recertification request to Deans
Wednesday Before Match Week		12:00 p.m. ECFMG data exchange completed 12:00 p.m. Deans' recertification deadline
Friday Before Match Week		12:00 p.m. NRMP notifies applicants newly-eligible for Scramble
MATCH WEEK Monday	11:30 a.m. Schools: Unmatched Seniors Report 12:00 p.m. Applicants: Did I Match? 12:00 p.m. Regional Match Statistics	11:30 a.m. Schools: Unmatched Seniors Report 12:00 p.m. Applicants: Did I Match? 12:00 p.m. Programs Did I Fill? 12:00 p.m. List of Unfilled Positions posted 12:00 p.m. Regional Match Statistics 12:00 p.m. ERAS opens in Scramble mode Applicants begin sending applications using ERAS Telephone communications between applicants and programs may begin, but no offers allowed
Tuesday	11:30 a.m. Programs: Did I Fill? 11:30 a.m. Schools: List of Unfilled Programs 12:00 p.m. List of Unfilled Positions Applicants begin sending applications	Applicants and programs communicate by program-initiated telephone interviews
Wednesday	6:00 a.m. Schools: Match Notification Letters 6:00 a.m. Schools: Electronic Match Results 6:00 a.m. Schools: Match Results (Web) 6:00 a.m. Schools: Applicant Choices by Specialty 6:00 a.m. Advanced Data Tables 2:00 p.m. Programs: Roster of Matched Applicants	11:00 a.m. Program preference list deadline 12:00 p.m. Electronic offers begin using R3 System Offers made every two hours, with last offers valid from 6:-8:00 p.m.
Thursday	Match Day! 12:00 p.m. School Ceremonies 1:00 p.m. Applicants: Where Did I Match?	Offers made every two hours beginning at 10:00 a.m. with last offers valid 6:00-8:00 p.m. 8:00 a.m. Schools: Match Notification Letters 8:00 a.m. Schools: Electronic Match Results 8:00 a.m. Schools: Match Results (Web) 8:00 a.m. Schools: Applicant Choices by Specialty 8:00 a.m. Advanced Data Tables 2:00 p.m. Programs: Roster of Matched Applicants
Friday		Match Day! 12:00 p.m. School Ceremonies 1:00 p.m. Applicants: Where Did I Match? Offers made every two hours beginning at 10:00 a.m. with last offers valid 4:00-6:00 p.m. 6:00 p.m. ERAS Scramble mode ends Dynamic List of Unfilled Positions posted thru May 1
Monday	12:00 p.m. Match Outcome for All Programs 12:00 p.m. Match Results by Ranked Applicant	12:00 p.m. Match Outcome for All Programs 12:00 p.m. Match Results by Ranked Applicant

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

1. Who should be able to participate in the Scramble? Any applicant who registered for the Match, or:
 - Only applicants who submitted certified rank order lists?
 - Only IMGs who have met the ECFMG examination requirements?
 - Off-cycle U.S. seniors who were withdrawn from the Match?
 - Are there legal issues if participation in the Scramble is restricted to certain applicants? Does payment of the registration fee entitle all unmatched applicants to the List of Unfilled Programs?
2. Should the different standards for participation of U.S. seniors and IMGs in the Match extend to the Scramble?
 - IMGs must pass USMLE Steps 1 and 2 for ECFMG certification. No similar requirement exists for U.S. seniors.
 - If uniform standards were implemented, could sufficient test space be created for Step 2 CS so that all U.S. seniors would be able to pass prior to the Match ranking deadline or prior to the beginning of the Scramble?
 - Would imposition of a requirement that U.S. seniors pass USMLE Steps 1 and 2 prior to the ranking deadline or prior to the Scramble constitute inappropriate interference with U.S. medical schools' policies and graduation requirements?
3. What is the best method for educating student affairs deans, Match applicants, and residency program directors about changes to the Scramble?
4. Are there unintended consequences?
 - Will programs submit shorter rank order lists in the Match, resulting in more unmatched applicants?
 - Will applicants rank only their preferred specialties, resulting in programs filling all their positions but with their less preferred applicants?
 - Will applicants rank fewer programs and avoid "safety" programs, resulting in more unmatched applicants?

CALL TO ACTION

If approved, it is expected that all Match participants will adopt this managed Scramble solution. During Match Week, programs could not offer and applicants could not accept positions outside the managed Scramble. Programs could elect not to fill their positions during Match Week or not to fill them at all. Is this a viable solution for your program and your specialty? Are there additional concerns and/or issues the Work Group should address?
