THE MATCH®
NATIONAL RESIDENT MATCHING PROGRAM®

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Dear Editor:

"Assuring Integrity in the Residency Match Process" raises important points about the application, interview, and matching processes through which medical students obtain positions in U.S. graduate medical education programs; however, some of the authors' information is either incomplete or outdated.

The authors rightly note the power imbalance between applicants and residency program staff. It is unfortunate that some programs take advantage of that imbalance by asking inappropriate questions. As the authors note, the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) Match Participation Agreement[1] historically has prohibited questions about applicants' rank order lists. Since 2009 the Agreement also has barred programs from requiring applicants to reveal the names or identities of programs where they apply, and since 2017 it has barred programs from requesting specialty, geographic location, or other identifying information about applicants' choices. Although comprehensive, the Agreement addresses only the policies governing the Matching Program and not questions that may be illegal under federal or state laws.

In 2012, the NRMP created the non-binding Match Communication Code of Conduct[2] jointly with the Organization of Program Director Associations. The Code supplements the Match Participation Agreement by discouraging program directors from asking illegal or coercive questions, soliciting or requiring post-interview communication, or requiring second visits, all of which are issues identified by the authors. Neither the Agreement nor the Code prohibits either party from volunteering ranking information, nor do they bar post-interview communication, as the authors suggest. To do so would be unrealistic. What if applicants have questions about the program or program staff have questions about applicants' qualifications?

The NRMP is keenly aware of challenges associated with the resident recruitment process and committed to ensuring integrity in all phases of the Match. Recognizing that applicants may fear repercussions, in 2017 the NRMP created an on-line form that allows applicants to anonymously report alleged program violations, a fact not mentioned by the authors. The NRMP vigorously enforces its policies, but breaches can only be investigated if they are reported. Moreover, the NRMP cannot by itself ensure that applicants and programs conduct their affairs in an ethical and professionally responsible manner. Program directors must educate all faculty and staff who interview applicants about Match policies, and applicants have a responsibility to report questionable program behavior.

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[1] Match Agreements & Resources. www.nrmp.org/match-participation-agreements. Accessed November 19, 2018.

[2] Match Communication Code of Conduct. www.nrmp.org/communicaton-code-of-conduct. Accessed November 19, 2018.