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Applying to Dermatology Residency without a Home Program: Advice to Medical Students in the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond



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1 **Applying to Dermatology Residency without a Home Program: Advice to Medical Students**
2 **in the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond**

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34 Dermatology has historically been one of the most competitive residencies to match into.
35 Successful candidates generally have stellar USMLE scores, often with significant amounts of
36 research, and excellent letters of recommendations.^{1,2} One factor often overlooked is the
37 importance of having mentors in the field, as they have experience guiding successful applicants
38 and can provide great insight into what residency programs are looking for. While many mentor-
39 mentee relationships naturally occur due to home affiliations, students who do not have home
40 dermatology programs (NHDPs) may struggle to form these relationships and subsequently
41 obtain proper guidance. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it even more
42 challenging for NHDPs given limited shadowing and away rotation opportunities. Here, we share
43 advice on how NHDPs can form strong mentor-mentee relationships during the COVID-19
44 pandemic and beyond in order to obtain the proper guidance needed to match into dermatology.

45 During the preclinical years, NHDPs should attempt to reach out to their medical school's
46 alumni who have matched into dermatology programs, as alumni have experience navigating the
47 school's curriculum while maximizing dermatology exposure. They can provide guidance on
48 contacting local physicians and potential research opportunities. If available, dermatology
49 residency advisors at the medical school may also provide similar information. NHDPs should
50 also consider reaching out to nearby dermatology programs to shadow attendings. Over time,
51 NHDPs can develop professional relationships with these physicians and ask to formally become
52 their mentees. If internal mentor-mentee programs exist, NHDPs can ask to join these initiatives.
53 While working alongside attendings, NHDPs will naturally get opportunities to connect with and
54 learn from residents or students from other medical schools as well. Residents can be a great
55 source of information, as they recently went through the process and some residents may be
56 former NHDPs themselves.

57 Another avenue for NHDPs to obtain mentorship is through research. By working closely
58 with dermatologists on research projects, NHDPs can develop professional relationships and
59 obtain mentorship. To find these research opportunities, NHDPs can seek out research projects at
60 neighboring dermatology institutions by asking residents or attendings with whom they have
61 worked with. Although many opportunities may not work out, persistence, time, and ingenuity
62 are needed. Alternatively, NHDPs can email physicians who specialize in different or presenters
63 at conferences to see if they have opportunities to get involved in research. Given that many
64 conferences are virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the latter option is becoming more
65 popular. Lastly, NHDPs can participate in extended research rotations or fellowships at different
66 institutions, which can allow them to develop relationships with faculty.

67 Another interesting avenue to form mentor-mentee relationships is through social media.
68 For example, Twitter can be used to engage in discussions with dermatologists to find mentors
69 during the COVID-19 pandemic by searching #dermtwitter.³ This enables users to identify
70 individuals with shared interest with the opportunity to further develop dynamics through direct
71 messaging, as people are now more open to meeting remotely. Also, the increased activity of
72 residency programs on social media due to COVID-19 has made virtual “meet-and-greets” more
73 accessible by advertising through Instagram accounts. Historically, the Dermatology Interest
74 Group Association (DIGA) has advertised mentorship programs and research fellowships, such
75 as the DIGA faculty mentorship program for NHDPs, through these outlets. Furthermore, many
76 dermatologic societies offer great mentorship opportunities—including the American Academy
77 of Dermatology Diversity Mentorship Program, Medical Dermatology Society Mentorship
78 Program, and Skin of Color Society-Mentorship Program—for medical students.⁴ Staying up-

79 to-date on available opportunities for mentorship is imperative and can be supported through
80 social media.

81 Above, we have shared our perspective on different strategies that NHDPs can utilize to
82 form strong mentor-mentee relationships with dermatologists (**Table 1**). We hope that these
83 practices will help students obtain the guidance they need to successfully obtain a dermatology
84 residency position.

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85 **References**

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112 **Table 1:** Strategies that NHDPs can use to find mentorship opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

Mentorship Opportunities	Examples
Alumni who matched into dermatology or dermatology residency advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquire about opportunities to maximize dermatology exposure while balancing medical school responsibilities. • Request to be connected with faculty at different institutions that can provide mentorship.
Local dermatology programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shadow or work with faculty on a routine basis and ask to become a mentee. • Inquire about formal mentorship opportunities at their institution. • Become acquainted with residents, especially those that were former NHDPs, and seek advice as needed
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with dermatology faculty at different institutions on research projects and ask to become their mentee. • Attend research conferences to learn about topics of interest and reach out to faculty specializing in the pertinent topics • Participate in research fellowships and work closely with designated faculty
Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search #Dermtwitter and follow accounts such as @derminterest to find and engage in conversations with dermatologists • Engage with dermatology residency social media accounts to attend events specific to each program. • Use Instagram to learn about mentorship and fellowship opportunities on the Dermatology Interest Group Association (DIGA) page and individual dermatology residency pages. • Find and use links on the DIGA website, such as the following: to locate fellowship opportunities: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1q6rKR0emDDM6twbyT2L3s7_CmsAz8ks8saRUs8Ryl40/edit#gid=0