

Selecting a Pediatric Orthopedic Fellowship

Orthopedic surgery is fortunate with a variety of exciting opportunities for subspecialty fellowship training following the completion of residency. But, the process of fellowship selection can be confusing for applicants and for fellowship programs. The matching program for orthopedic residency has worked well for many years. The matching programs for some subspecialties have failed for a variety of reasons. The most commonly cited reason is a mismatch between the number of applicants and the number of positions being offered.

Also, there may be some relationship to successful matching programs and Subspecialty Certification by the American Board of Orthopedic Surgery. Currently, the ABOS has established education standards and qualifications in two subspecialty areas of orthopedic surgery, Surgery of the Hand and Orthopedic Sports Medicine. There is not a subspecialty certification process for pediatric orthopedic surgery although almost all practicing pediatric orthopedic surgeons have completed at least one year of fellowship training.

There is not a requirement for certification in Pediatric Orthopedic Surgery. Accreditation of fellowships is voluntary and is supervised by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). Accreditation insures that certain standards of education are being met, but lack of accreditation does not imply that programs are inferior. Many excellent fellowship programs have elected not to enter, or to withdraw from this voluntary accreditation process.

Currently, there is no formal matching program for pediatric orthopedic surgery. There are many more pediatric orthopedic fellowship positions than applicants to fill them. A resident who decides late in residency to pursue a career in pediatric orthopedic surgery will have no difficulty finding an excellent fellowship position. Therefore, when beginning the interview process for fellowships in children's orthopedics, you will find that there is no match available and you are in the driver's seat. Although navigating the post-match application environment requires a bit of savvy, you will find yourself in a very positive circumstance.

Furthermore, upon completing your fellowship, you will find that there is somewhat of a shortage of well-trained children's orthopedists in North America. As a result, many high paying practice opportunities will be available to you, both in academic centers and in private practice. Thus, it is a happy circumstance for fellowship applicants and for fellowship graduates.

Despite this positive environment for applicants, there has been some confusion regarding both the general timetable and scheduling interviews. In a few circumstances applicants have felt some pressure to accept a position before they had the opportunity to visit all the programs that they wished to see. General recommendations for the fellowship selection process were developed by an ad hoc committee of the Pediatric Orthopedic Society of North America (POSNA) and utilized in the 2007 match. Most applicants and fellowship directors felt this led to an improved process.

The process outlines interviews starting about September 1, 2008 (23 months before the actual starting date of one's fellowship) with the interview period extending to December 19, 2008. This allows four months for travel and interviews. All program directors have agreed to not pressure applicants to make a decision before December 20.

If you feel pressured to make an early decision that is not in your best interest, the POSNA Board encourages you to contact the Chairman of our Ad Hoc Committee on Pediatric Orthopedic Practice at POSNA Headquarters (847/384-4246).

Applicants may ask for an offer, or ask to know where they are ranked at any time. Fellowship programs may offer a position, or tell an applicant where they are ranked at any time, but may not ask for a decision before December 20, 2008.

As December 20, 2008 approaches, confirmations regarding positions may be made, but requests for final decisions from applicants is discouraged prior to December 20, 2008.

No matter what fellowship you choose congratulations on your decision for a career in pediatric orthopedics. You are in the driver's seat in selecting a program, and you can be assured of excellent training opportunities as well as well-paying career in what is truly the greatest subspecialty in orthopedic surgery!