

FAQs: NEUROLOGY

Given Step 1 is now Pass/Fail, what advice would you give to a first-year medical student about what they can or should be doing early on to be competitive in your specialty?

[Some comments from our current PD]: When I look at an application, of course I see their board scores and of Step 1 will only make Step 2 more apparent (and important). Beyond that, I look at their other academic/research and extra-curricular activities and some students are filling their applications with hordes of activities and research involvement but we would really appreciate and value fewer, but more meaningful activities. One of the most important qualities is a clear interest in clinical neurology, especially having completed a rotation/shadowing, maybe a case presentation (at the very least mention of an interesting case), and preferably a letter or two from a neurologist that knows you well.

Would you ever take someone with a Step 1 failure?

- Potentially if there were clear extenuating circumstances and other very strong attributes.

What advice would you give about getting letters of recommendation in your specialty?

- Ask the neurology staff member who directly observed your work to write a letter of recommendation. It's ok to make sure (ask if) they are able to write a strong letter before committing – consider asking for feedback before requesting a letter. Be sure to supply the letter writer with all the information they need to complete the letter – your CV, personal statement, names and addresses, and your specialty interests and goals for your future. Be sure to give your letter writers at least a month to complete letter.

What is the value of doing audition rotations in your specialty?

Completing a rotation is the best way to get to know a program, its staff and residents. It is also the best way for the program to get to know you. Make it clear very early that you're interested in applying to Neurology residency programs including the program you're visiting. Be sure to be yourself, work hard with an enthusiastic attitude and ask lots of clinical and practical questions about the staff and program. Talk to the residents whenever possible.

To what extent does research, publications, or presentations affect one's ability to match in your specialty?

It depends on the program. Some academic neurology residency programs have very high expectations for prior research but most look for a balanced resume with good test scores and letters as well medical school transcript. Most Neurology residency programs are looking for clinical experience/exposure as well as research exposure/experience.

Is a Step 2CK score needed before you will invite someone for an interview?

Yes for the most part.

What does the perfect applicant look like in your specialty?

A person with excellent academic performance including step score, medical school and undergraduate transcript (without interruptions) whose personal statement and experience demonstrate a sustained enthusiasm and aptitude for clinical neurology. Letters of recommendation indicate a strong work ethic, with clinical and

communication skills at or above the expected level for training. No impediments to starting and completing training or personal behaviors that demonstrate anything less than the highest ethical standards.

Does a student need to Honor in your specialty to match? No, but Honors or other indications of aptitude are helpful.

The students have significant elective time during their 3rd year for career exploration.

a. What electives would you recommend to a student who knows they are interested in your specialty?

Neurology, Neuroradiology, Neurosurgery, Psychiatry.

b. What electives would you recommend to a student who is undecided but considering your specialty?

- A clinical neurology elective should be very helpful, others as above.

Is there anything else I haven't asked that you feel an applicant to your specialty ought to know?

[Per one of our former Program Directors]: Neurology is a specialty that requires one to communicate very effectively, commit to lifelong learning and resilience. Neurology is THE best field!