

Plan Ahead or Fail [Still a Doctor in the House? / Issue 842]

The December 23 issue of Mishpacha did a great job explaining the critical issue of the shomer Shabbos residency. The reality is that Shabbos observance in a hospital is virtually impossible without a solid halachic background and tremendous determination to resist overwhelming pressure to conform to hospital norms that often cannot be reconciled with proper Shabbos observance.

The reason to pursue a residency that agrees in advance to accommodate one's religious requirements is that without such an understanding, it is unrealistic to believe that one will be able to meet the expectations of a standard residency program. Negotiating workarounds on the fly may be possible in some jobs, but doctors care for sick people. They must function within a tightly regulated system to ensure that care for patients will not be compromised.

The potential resident who does not plan ahead and matches into a program that may not be reconcilable with halachah is likely to wind up disappointed and frustrated when finding him/herself in a very awkward and impossible position requiring choosing between continued medical training and Shabbos observance.

The reality is that not every medical or surgical specialty may be compatible with Shabbos-compliant training (or practice), and therefore not every specialty may be a viable choice. Nevertheless, there are many opportunities for medical training that do not require Shabbos desecration if one is steadfast and determined about finding such training (even at the expense of personal preferences such as location).

It is vital to prepare far in advance by learning the extensive pertinent medical halachos and finding a qualified rav to whom ongoing sh'eilos can be asked. It is also crucial that one be able to cogently explain to a residency program precisely what one's needs are and how they are obtainable within the program at which one is interviewing.

My website (jewishmedicalethics.com/shomer-shabbos-residency) explains some of the halachic issues involved in shomer Shabbos residency and gives advice on how to prepare for interviews that may be of help to interested medical students and programs seeking to understand the issues involved.

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