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Dr. David E. Longnecker  
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Dear Dr. Longnecker:

We met on February 17 regarding the issue of officially incorporating Sabbath observant residencies for Orthodox Jewish residents as an official option in the National Resident Matching Program. To review, Sabbath observant residencies allow Sabbath observant physicians to be off duty approximately 25-26 hours for one day per week beginning a little before sunset every Friday night, with the same arrangement for major Jewish holidays (approximately 10-12 days during the year, depending on overlaps with Sabbath days). In return, the resident makes up the missed call days with extra Sundays, and secular and non-Jewish holidays, with the understanding that all residents take an equitable amount of call in the course of the year.

In view of the above time constraints, there are two main requirements that must be met before Sabbath observant residencies can be viable options:

1. Residency programs must be protected from matching more Sabbath observant physicians than their schedule can reasonably accommodate; and
2. Sabbath observant physicians must be protected from finding that their Sabbath needs cannot be met because their program accepted an excessive number of Sabbath observers.

There are difficulties inherent in the current system. Programs are unable to rank Sabbath observant physicians whom they may want, or they may be forced to discontinue their Sabbath observant residency programs altogether because of the fear of accepting an excessive number of Sabbath observant physicians (both of which have occurred). There are a few programs that tend to have many Sabbath observant applicants, but have room for only a few of them and structure their schedule to accommodate this specific number. They are forced to ask for a (non-binding) commitment from applicants before the match to protect themselves from matching more Sabbath observant physicians than they can handle. An official option for Sabbath observant residencies within the match would obviate the need for this commitment. While the quality of medical training is of paramount importance in Jewish Law, many Sabbath observant applicants would be more than happy to match at their second or third choice if it would guarantee Sabbath observance.

Many programs are open to the idea of Sabbath observant residencies as indicated by a limited survey of the situation performed this past year by myself and another student in

conjunction with the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine (please see the appendix and accompanying materials). An expansion of this survey, such as presenting it as a set of questions on the FRIEDA questionnaire and including the results in the FRIEDA program, would open up many more programs than currently exist and broaden the training options for Sabbath observant physicians.

As we discussed, a system to remedy the above problems must neither be discriminatory in nature, nor burdensome on residency programs. Residency positions cannot be “set aside” for Sabbath observant applicants, and residency programs must retain complete autonomy over whom they match. With these considerations in mind, I would like to make the following proposal:

Each residency program, after having the concept of Sabbath observant residencies explained to them, would decide each year on a maximum number of Sabbath observant physicians that they could accommodate, with the understanding that such positions are not promised, but available to Sabbath observant residents. In other words, if a program states that it can accommodate two Sabbath observant residents, the program is not required to accept two Sabbath observant residents. Rather, those two positions would be equally available to applicants who are not Sabbath observant. Yet, if a program does rank more than two Sabbath observant residents, the program must be guaranteed that it will not end up accepting more than the maximum number of Sabbath observant physicians that it can handle. This can be accomplished by the assigning of a special number to the Sabbath observant spots. Both the regular and Sabbath observant spots would be combined at the time of the match so that the special numbers only come into play if there are Sabbath observant candidates high enough on a program’s match list that they would match anyway. The value of the special number is as follows: if three candidates all listed the special number for a given program and all of them were sufficiently high on a program’s match list to receive spots, the third candidate would be removed from the program’s list (by his/her own request by choosing the special number). In this way, while no spots are reserved for Sabbath observers, the match computer would limit how many Sabbath observers could match to a given program based upon the residency program’s pre-submitted limitations. This system would fulfill both requirements of a Sabbath observant residency program, while neither being discriminatory nor unduly limiting the applicants or the programs.

In review, in order to address all of the concerns discussed above, we are proposing the following system by which a residency program will be able to indicate how many Sabbath observant residents they could accommodate:

1. Each residency program would decide on the maximum number of Sabbath observant physicians it can reasonably accommodate. That program would then be given a separate number in the matching system which applicants would use to designate their choice for Sabbath observance. The programs would rank their list in the usual manner, but the computer would only match up to the maximum number of Sabbath observant physicians indicated by the program. Thus, the programs could rank all of their applicants regardless of their Sabbath observance status, yet not be exposed to the risk of accepting more Sabbath observant physicians than their program could

handle. In this way programs would not jeopardize their autonomy over whom they list for the match.

2. The FRIEDA questionnaire would ask residency programs whether or not they would like to offer this Sabbath observant option to their residents. This information would then be made available to all applicants via FRIEDA.

I have discussed this proposal with several residency program directors, both in and out of Philadelphia, who have been very supportive of developing a system such as the one outlined above as an option in their departments. Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,

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