

Suggestions for medical students applying to psychiatry residencies

Curated responses from psychiatry program directors

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1. Recognize the importance of professionalism in all communication with the program, including your demeanor with program administrators. Be considerate of your fellow applicants. If you are cancelling an interview, do so as soon as they know they're not coming so that someone else may have a chance.
2. Recognize the importance of the interview day, and all that goes with it. Do not take the dinner with residents lightly, especially when out with smaller group of three to four people. Be aware your behavior is being observed at all times by all involved. Therefore, appear interested and motivated at all times-- no texting or otherwise referencing your device during lunch or dinner with residents/fellows. Even if lunch or dinner is touted as informal or casual, remember your behavior should be neither. Soda water with lime is a delicious beverage. Dress in a professional and conservative manner.
3. During the application process or interviews, never act entitled or demanding with the program coordinator, no matter how anxious you may be. This is a common issue encountered by programs.
4. Have sincere, tailored questions for everyone, not just the first interviewer. However, be careful to avoid overly "canned" questions directly from a list of "questions to be sure to ask". These types of questions leave the interviewer with the impression you are approaching the interview as a checklist, rather than a conversation. Beware of the phenomenon of interview fatigue. The first interviewer may feel the applicant performed well and later interviewers believe the applicant was just not interested.
5. Be prepared with a full, articulate, thoughtful answer about how you became interested in the field. If you just answer that question in 1-2 sentences, interviewers can't really develop a good idea of your motivation and fit for a program. It's OK to reiterate elements of your personal statement, don't assume every interviewer has read this or remembers what you have written.
6. Recognize the importance of a well-written personal statement that introduces the program director to who you are and why you are interested in psychiatry. If you have a problem of some sort, be honest about it and ready to address the impact of the problem on your growth. Everybody has problems but how you handle it and learn from it is what is crucial. Recognize the value in demonstrating honesty in addressing a problem issue, whether it's a failing grade, a low USMLE score or maybe something more personal that you need to address. An honest attitude can make all the difference.
7. Recognize the importance of showing a dedication to psychiatry in your application.
8. Show interest in the program to which you are applying, both in your application and on the interview day. Consider tailoring the personal statement, to answer the question why "us"? Why a small program in a rural area, when there are lots of other programs? However, avoid boilerplate responses taken directly from the webpage. Program directors tend to look at geographical aspects of the application, so if the student is from far away but has a fiancé or important family member in the area of the program, an email or tailored personal statement that may prompt the program director to look at the application. Consider reaching out to program directors or administrators at programs you are particularly interested in and let them know why you are specifically applying to their program. However, don't expect a response.
9. Recognize that there are lots of excellent programs across the country and that you should apply to a variety of programs in terms of competitiveness and location.