



# A Faculty Member's Guide to Supporting Students Before, During and After the National Residency Match

Created by the UBC MD Undergraduate Program (MDUP) Office of Student Affairs and the Office of Faculty Development, this guide outlines the **ways faculty members can support medical students before, during, and after** the National Residency Match, and where to learn about **reference letters** if students request one from you as a faculty member.

## Pre-National Residency Match

### Overview

Throughout their educational journey, medical students have been actively exploring their potential career paths. Faculty members play a crucial role in this process by providing guidance and support for medical students to self-assess and reflect on their strengths, interests, and values, and provide career exploration opportunities and mentorship as medical students deliberate their career decisions.

In year 4, medical students apply for residency through the National Residency Match (the Match) operated via the [Canadian Resident Matching Service \(CaRMS\)](#). The Match strives to fairly match medical students with residency training programs, aiming to provide equal opportunities for applicants in Canada. The Match promotes merit-based selection to facilitate a competitive, choice-driven process for matching applicants with residency training programs.

The Match process can be stressful and competitive. The application process requires significant time for preparation of the application and interviews. As the first iteration of the Match Day approaches, medical students' stress levels may peak in anticipation of the Match results.

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## What can you do for medical students during this time?

### Promote awareness of resources as medical students prepare to apply, such as:

- The UBC [Student Affairs Entrada Site](#) (*CWL login required*) that contains extensive and valuable resources for [Career planning, including CaRMS and residency preparation](#).
- [UBC Student Affairs](#) 1-to-1 career advising consultations with the career planning team.
- The Association of American Medical Colleges' (AAMC) [Careers in Medicine](#) tests to explore career options.
- The [CaRMS website](#) for information about the match, or [CanPREPP](#), a virtual platform to explore residency training programs across Canada.



**Discuss with medical students their career interests and encourage reflective thinking.**

Medical students value interactions with faculty members around their career considerations. These interactions are an important part of medical student identity formation.

**Informal discussions** about medical students' career interests can be a valuable way for faculty members to support their students' professional development. Informal conversations offer a more relaxed and spontaneous opportunity to provide guidance and advice.

Consider:

- Fostering an open and welcoming environment where medical students feel comfortable approaching you with career-related questions or concerns.
- Showing genuine interest in their career goals and aspirations.

**Formal mentorship programs** offer a structured process to discuss medical students' career interests, and opportunities to share your own journey. Faculty members can support medical students by participating as mentors in the variety of programs available. Visit the [Expression of Interest form](#) to see the full range of mentorship opportunities and to become involved.

Opportunities:

<b>Shadowing</b>	A medical student visits you in your clinical setting, and observes a day in the life of your practice.
<b>Career Planning Café</b>	A maximum of 8 medical students meets you in a 45-minute casual environment on Zoom where they learn about different areas of medicine.
<b>Mentorship Program</b>	A 1:1 or group mentorship where medical students meet you in a casual, supportive, and confidential environment outside the medical school curriculum.

**Coaching style questions** can be helpful in both informal and formal discussions with medical students. Initiating career discussions with faculty members can be challenging and intimidating for medical students. You can help guide their own self-reflection on where they want to be, or prompt exploration so they can be prepared for the process.

**Ask coaching-style questions about their interest in specialties/fields.**

- What career(s) are you currently considering?
- What strengths do you bring to programs you are considering?
- What are you doing to further explore your career interests?

**Follow-up with medical students throughout the year.**

- Would discussing your options be helpful for your decision-making process?
- What are you discovering while exploring career choices?

**If a medical student is in year 3 or 4:** Are there any Match process and/or career preparation challenges you wish to discuss?



## During the Match (supporting preparation)

### Timelines

Beginning as early as the start of clinical clerkship rotations, medical students may ask you for a reference for their Match application. In the summer and fall of year 4, they will be hard at work polishing their curricula vitae, finalizing reference letters, and writing personal letters for the residency training programs they are applying to. The Match applications are generally due in late November/early December. After applications are reviewed by residency training programs, interviews are offered, then take place mid-January/late February. In the spring, applicants and residency training programs rank their preferences, with the results of the first iteration available to medical students and residency training programs in March on MATCH DAY.

For more details on process including current timelines, visit the [CaRMS website](#).

### What can you do for medical students during this time?

#### 1. Write Reference Letters

You may be asked by medical students to provide a reference letter for their Match application. Reference letters have been shown to be a critical factor in the medical students' success in the process.

#### Considerations if asked to write a letter:

##### **SHOULD I SAY YES OR NO?**

If you do not feel that you can provide a supportive, positive letter of reference then best not. Please let the medical student know and include the reasons behind your decision. Consider using it as an opportunity for constructive feedback, which is always useful to medical students in their clinical years.

##### **WILL THE LETTER BE CONFIDENTIAL?**

The medical student should not read and or see the final contents of the letter. Confidentiality increases the validity of the letter's content, and is a requirement for most programs to consider the letter at all. CaRMS will not share the letters with medical students before or after the Match.

##### **AM I THE RIGHT PERSON?**

Most letters must be from a clinical supervisor in the clinical clerkship and/or elective years. For rotations that involve many supervisors, the letter can be a summary of collegial opinions as well as your own personal reflections. Some medical students may ask for a non-clinical or character letter. This is requested by some residency training programs, and can be useful in particular circumstances.





## HOW DO I KNOW 'YOU' AGAIN?

If you do not remember a medical student, it may be helpful to meet with them briefly. Have them bring their end-of-clerkship assessment and CV to jog your memory. Though a student may describe a delightful experience working at your side, do not feel beholden to provide a reference you cannot give in good faith. If you have agreed to write a letter for a student well before the application deadline, consider asking the student to summarize memorable cases or key points from their time working with you in an email so you can refer back to this to improve your memory of the interactions you had when writing the letter.

## HOW MANY REFERENCE LETTERS ARE NEEDED?

Sometimes a medical student may request several letters due to the complexity of the application process (e.g., a general letter, a residency program specific letter, etc.). Your patience and understanding are appreciated during this time as some residency training programs are very competitive. We recommend that most medical students apply to multiple programs to increase the chances that they match to a career option that they would enjoy. Consider writing a general letter for the medical student addressing the standard referee requirements, with an interchangeable paragraph for particulars. Ensure the letters you write are submitted within their respective deadlines as an incomplete package may result in medical students not being considered for a residency program.

For more information on how to write reference letters, please visit the [CaRMS website](#).

## 2. Support Interview Preparation

[UBC MDUP Student Affairs](#) provides an opportunity for medical students to practice interview questions in small groups or 1:1. You can support medical students by suggesting they check out the Interview [Preparation Guide on Entrada](#) (CWL login required), and by practicing sample interview questions with them. Sample questions include:

Tell me about yourself.  
Why are you interested in this program?  
How would your friends describe you?  
What are your strengths and weaknesses?  
Tell us about your research/scholarship experience.  
What leadership roles have you held?

What motivates you?  
What types of things help maintain your wellness and how with this help you in residency?  
Recount a time you received tough feedback.  
Tell me about a conflict and how you navigated it?  
What will be the toughest aspect of this residency program for you?

Medical students can find more sample questions on [Entrada](#) (CWL login required).

### During the interviews, the ranking process, and waiting.

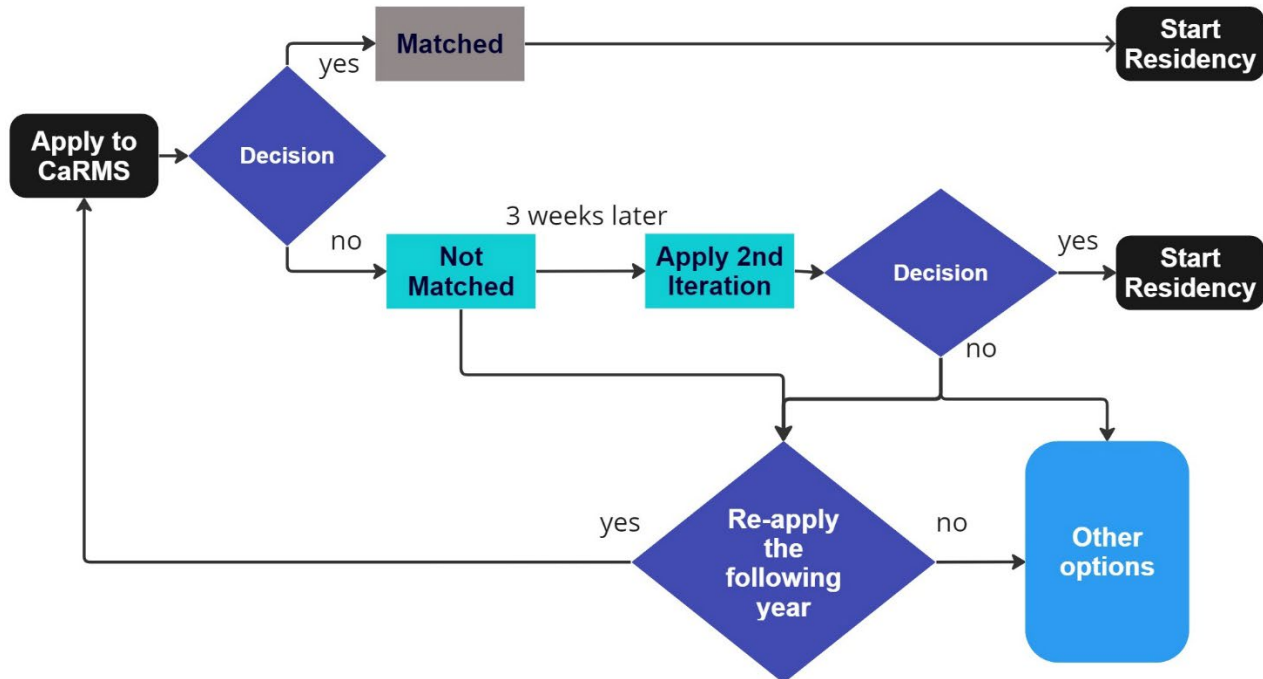
Be cognizant that medical students may have heightened stress and perform differently than expected during this time. The Match is a major life decision and it may be challenging for them to balance this process alongside their usual learning activities.





## Post-CaRMS

### Potential Match Day Scenarios



Some medical students may not match in the first iteration and have approximately three weeks to apply to the second iteration. This can involve a significant pivot in plans and require support from mentors and [UBC MDUP Student Affairs](#). Medical students who remain unmatched in the second iteration of the Match may return to the Match the following year, and/or pursue other options, such as studying in a graduate level university degree program.

This is another huge adjustment for learners who must again adapt. Collective support from mentors, the UBC MDUP Student Affairs team, and the MD Undergraduate Program (MDUP) is key.

UBC MDUP Student Affairs has prepared this [FAQ resource](#) (CWL login required) which provides information on options for the year for medical students who have not yet matched, or did not match.

### Students may require

- Time to process and adapt to their results
- Additional time before they share their match results with family, friends, classmates, and mentors

### When the result does not match their desired outcome students may:

- Feel a variety of emotions about their Match results
- Not wish to discuss in a group setting





### Encourage the medical students to:

- Identify the next steps they want to take
- Connect with UBC MDUP [STUDENT AFFAIRS](#)
- Review [What Happens if I Don't Match?](#) (CWL login required) on the UBC MDUP Student Affairs Entrada site
- Seek counselling through [STUDENT SERVICES](#) or the [Physician Help Program \(PHP\)](#)
- Seek support from other sources (e.g., peers, family, friends, their care provider)

### Inquiring about results

We recommend that when engaging with a medical student in a follow-up scenario, whether you are initiating or responding to one, to avoid group settings and inquiries assuming everything went well or as expected. Instead consider indirect, empathic inquiries conveying an openness to debrief how it went.

#### Avoid:

*“Was that your first choice?”*

*“You must be so thrilled”* – We presume any match is super news, and it is, but it is a life-changing experience that may expose mixed feelings and complications.

#### Consider Instead:

*“I understand Match Day took place. How are you doing with your news?”*

*“Getting your match news is a lot to take in. I hope that goes really well for you. Let me know if you want to talk things over.”*

*This document has been adapted with gratitude from the Dalhousie University Faculty of Medicine resource “Supporting Medical Learners: CaRMS Match Day.”*

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