Iserson’s Getting Into a Residency: A Guide for Medical Students


This book is a well-crafted guide through the complex processes of assessing oneself; choosing a specialty; selecting programs; and applying, interviewing, and matching for a medical residency. Chapters cover the residency search steps in logical fashion and provide insight into how grades, examinations, research, and electives are measured in assessing applicants. Along with basic how-to steps (filling out the application, writing a personal statement, and how to interview), the author touches on broader concepts for an applicant to consider first, such as physician supply and demand issues, the importance of a mentor, and licensure requirements. Several self-analysis checklists allow the reader to evaluate their interests, strengths, and dislikes, and to rate the suitability of particular programs for their own goals and profile. There is a well-indexed, substantial bibliography of resources offered, along with a valuable glossary of terms and a roster of agency contact addresses.

This hefty 640-page volume collates an extensive amount of information about the policies, procedures, and timelines that apply to the residency search, accurately citing information from sources such as the National Residency Matching Program, the Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS), the San Francisco Match, and the National Board of Medical Examiners. A generous number of figures and charts provide valuable data and facts that offer the reader additional insights into specialty trends, physicians’ career satisfaction quotient by specialty, and match results. An extensive chapter is devoted to specialty and subspecialty descriptions, and the author offers groupings of specialties based on how competitive they are to enter. Iserson additionally includes 2 chapters addressing the needs of readers with special situations (women; couples; and persons who are gay, impaired, older, etc) and those who are international medical school graduates.

The book’s utility is greatly enhanced by its organization, which permits the reader to target specific questions or stages of the process quickly, and those who wish to understand more about the action recommended or the logic behind the suggestions will find a satisfying amount of detailed discussion. While medical students and other candidates for postgraduate training are the primary audience of this book, it should be equally as useful to those who counsel students and select residents and fellows for their programs.

The author has drawn on his years of career advising and compressed it into this guidebook, which is written in the voice of a seasoned faculty mentor. This book’s first edition was published in 1988, and the expanded amount of information included in the current sixth edition is evidence that the process of entering a medical residency is not growing simpler, but increasingly complex. Those pursuing a residency will find it to be a well-researched and logically organized book that is easy to read, accurate, and insightful. Thoughtful readers also will realize that Iserson’s book is not a “one size fits all” solution to getting a residency, but rather it is best used as a roadmap to help candidates navigate the process effectively while pondering their own unique needs and plans.

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