

So, you want to be a Psychosomatic Medicine Fellow?

Congratulations! You're embarking on an exciting time in your career development – the pursuit of fellowship training. The following information may be helpful as you navigate the process of researching, applying, interviewing, and choosing a fellowship location.

Unlike the residency selection process through the National Residency Match Program (NRMP) and the ERAS system, the fellowship application process is *not standardized*. You must research programs, apply to them individually, and choose where to interview based on offers. After interviewing, there is *no ranking process* for applicants and programs.

To assist both fellowship applicants and fellowship programs, the Fellowship Education Subcommittee of the Academy of Psychosomatic Medicine (APM) has developed 1) a Common Application form which many programs are willing to accept (please see below under “**The Application Process**” for details.), and 2) recruitment guidelines that have been adopted by the APM. These guidelines state that programs can *offer* positions at any time, but cannot require an *answer* prior to a specific date (please see below under “**Offers**” for details).

Timeline

It is recommended that you start investigating fellowship opportunities at the end of your third year of residency. Similar to the residency selection process during medical school, people typically start applying in the summer (between third and fourth year), and interview in the fall of fourth year. Of course, you want to give yourself the best possible chance at interviewing and being offered a position at the program of your choice – so don't delay!

Now is the time to ask your residency program how many days you can be gone for fellowship interviews. Ask if you can use educational days, or if you need to use vacation days. This will help you plan your interview schedule wisely.

How To Start

Decide what elements of fellowship are important to you. Issues may include:

- Geographical location
- Reputation of the Psychiatry Department and its Residency Training Program

- Number of fellows per year
- ACGME accreditation status
- Program curriculum
- Available clinical experiences (oncology, HIV, women's issues...)
- Research opportunities/academic project
- Particular supervisors/teachers you'd like to work with

Of course, like the residency application process, getting input from friends/loved ones/spouses may help elucidate which elements are most important to consider.

What Next?

Begin researching programs to see which ones fit your criteria noted above!

A particularly helpful resource is the website for the Academy of Psychosomatic Medicine (www.apm.org). This website has a list of current fellowship programs including their accreditation status, numbers of fellows per year, stipend amount, clinical experiences, and so forth. The APM website allows you to access program information individually.

PLEASE NOTE: Some of the programs listed on the APM website may not have updated their information in a year or two. Don't be alarmed. If the program sounds interesting and you'd like further information, contact the person designated as the program director (email addresses are listed along with the address and phone number contact information). Likewise, you may want to search the Internet for the particular institution's website and get more information that way.

The next page shows an example of a fellowship program entry on the APM website (www.apm.org/cl-pgms).

[... INSTITUTION NAME ...]		* ACGME accredited
		Program accepts the Common Application
Available positions annually (July):	2	
Duration:	1 year	
# Hospital Beds:	750	
# Inpatient Consults:	1600 per year	
Full Time / Part Time:	FT	
# Full-time Faculty Equivalents:	3.0	
Annual Salary:	\$45,000	
Funding:	100% hospital	
Instructor-level Faculty Appointment?	Yes	
Clinical Experience		
Hours:	20-35 hours/week	
# New Cases:	5-10 per week	
# Follow-up Cases:	7-10 per week	
Supervision:	3-5 hours/week	
Conferences, Rounds, Seminars:	7-15 hours/week	
Teaching Experience:		
Medical Student:	1-2 hours/week	
Psychiatry Resident:	2-6 hours/week	
Liaison:	1-2 hours/week	
Research Experience:		
	Required?	Optional
Academic Project Required?	Yes	
Comments:		
Oncology, palliative care, HIV; concentrations in liaison & education.		

← **Sample Program Listing from APM's online C-L/PM Fellowship Directory**

Note that the entry shows pertinent details about the program including hospital info, funding, clinical experience, teaching experience, and research experience.

Be sure to look at the top of the screen next to each program's name, to see if there is an asterisk ("*") indicating the program is ACGME accredited. There will also be a note if the program is accepting the Common Application form.

Not all programs will have similar features, so it is important to research widely in order to find programs with the best potential fit for you!

FREIDA online (www.ama-assn.org/go/freida) and the ACGME website (www.acgme.org) are also very useful sources of information. Other resources for fellowship information include the people at your own residency program. Faculty members or recent graduates may have ties to institutions with fellowship programs. Additional resources may include connections you've made through your local APA chapter, or through APM participation as a resident. Be sure to avail yourself of any assistance that these individuals can provide — "inside information" may prove to be helpful as you start your investigation into fellowships. Remember to be confident and clear in your quest to find the program which is the best match for you.

Now is a good time to start thinking about your personal statement. Yes, that pesky personal statement — the writing exercise you thought was far behind you after residency applications — is back again! Depending on the program, there may be short

answer questions on the application, and/or there may be a longer personal statement required. If you start working on this in advance, you won't be as stressed when it comes to filling out applications (see below).

This also may be a good time visit your local CVS or Walgreen's drugstore to get passport photos taken. Some applications will ask for pictures; some won't. However, if you get pictures done now, it will save you from rushing to get them done at a later time.

Now What?

The next step is to contact each program that you're interested in, to inquire if they are accepting applications for the following year. This can be done by emailing the program director (name and email addresses often available on the APM website, as noted above), or by sending a letter via US Mail. Of course, you will want to write a brief yet professional correspondence, indicating your interest in the program

and requesting additional information and/or application materials.

After this initial contact, programs will mail you their application packet including application form and requests for letters of recommendation, curriculum vitae, and so on. You then can begin the formal application process.

The Application Process

As with researching, don't delay applying to programs in which you are very interested. Be prepared that it may take you awhile to complete applications, depending on the number of programs to which you apply and depending on how detailed each application is. The APM Fellowship Education Subcommittee recently designed a Common Application form, available on the APM website at www.apm.org/career/common-app-pm-fellowship.shtml, and many programs are willing to accept this form making the process a little less burdensome. Due to institutional constraints however, not every program can accept this form and they will have their own application form. Even the programs accepting the Common Application Form may require additional information (for instance, there might be a graduate medical education office form as well as a specific psychosomatic medicine application form). So once again, start early and keep a checklist of what each program requires.

Enlist the help of your friends/colleagues/loved ones with particular talents for editing and ask them to look over your applications for clarity, content, and format. You also may want to ask a trusted faculty member to review your CV to ensure that it is up-to-snuff and professional.

When filling out application forms, be sure that they are done in a legible fashion. Typing may be your best option, particularly if your handwriting is difficult to decipher. Be sure to submit applications, along with any other pertinent items the programs have requested, in a timely fashion. When in doubt about an application requirement, contact the programs individually for clarification.

The Waiting Game

After submitting your applications, you can sit back and breathe a sigh of relief – but don't relax too much! You are now entering the "Waiting Game," when you're eagerly awaiting offers of interviews. However,

there are still things you can do to improve your application/interview experience. You may want to:

- Make copies of your CV, to bring to interviews
- Get reprints/copies of your publications, to bring to interviews
- Make a copy of your application for each program and bring it with you...it always helps to know what you said in your application!
- Bring business cards with you (if you have them) so that you can easily distribute your contact information to people interviewing you
- Create a list of questions you may want to ask during your interview
- Get your suit cleaned, your shoes polished, and dust off your briefcase for carrying around all the items listed above!

NOTE: Should you find that you haven't had any replies several weeks after submitting your application, contact the program director (or the program coordinator) to be sure that your application was received and didn't get lost in the mail. Assuming the application made it to its destination, all you can do is be patient and wait.

The Interview

Once you're offered an interview, it's time to set your travel plans into motion. Because you already checked with your residency program about taking days off for interviews, now is the time to decide what specific days to take off and then inform your program. Fellowship programs likely will give you several dates to choose from, so consider organizing a "circuit" of interviews based on geography. Again, don't dawdle as you decide about interview dates – fellowship programs have more applicants that you may think, and interview spots can fill up quickly.

Just as you did for residency interviews, plan your traveling wisely. Allow ample time for air or land travel between programs, pack wisely (and avoid checking luggage if possible, to prevent your luggage from taking a different trip than you do), and confirm all airplane, rental car, and hotel reservations prior to your trip. It is advisable to print out copies of all confirmation emails, just in case there are problems en route.

When dressing for your interviews, it is always wise to err on the side of formality. Suits are the accepted attire for interview days. Never assume that just because a program is in a relatively "casual" location

that it's ok to show up for an interview in chinos and flip-flops. Plan ahead for weather-related conditions and check weather reports for your travel dates, particularly if you're going someplace with weather that is very different from your residency location. (Also, don't forget to take the important interview application items listed above.)

During the interview day, be yourself and enjoy the experience. This is your chance to tell programs about yourself and your interests, and it's the interviewer's chance to tell you what their program has to offer. Be sure to get your questions answered, and talk to any available current fellows to get their impressions. It is wise, as you likely did for residency interviews, to write down the names of all the people you meet. This will make your follow-up "thank-you note" correspondence easier to complete.

Speaking of thank-you notes, it is always polite to send thank-you notes to those individuals who interviewed you. Hand-written notes to faculty, and emails to residents or fellows, are always appreciated and will demonstrate your communication skills and political savvy. It also is wise to extend thanks to any program coordinators that assisted in your interview scheduling and/or travel plans.

After the interview process is completed and you've sent your thank-you notes, you can relax and await offers for a fellowship position. Now is a good time to think about the programs you visited, what impression you got from each place, and which places you'd be most interested in being for your fellowship year. Each decision will depend on you as an individual and what the programs had to offer. You may get several offers from different programs, so be prepared to weigh the pros/cons of each program in order to help make your decision. Again, input of friends/family can be helpful during this time. Remember, however, that only *you* can make the ultimate decision regarding fellowship.

Offers

The process of being offered a position and either accepting or declining it is markedly different from when you applied for residency. Fellowship recruitment guidelines were adopted by the APM in 2008 (www.apm.org/sigs/fship-dirs/PM-FellowshipRecruitmentGuidelines.pdf). The guidelines state that that offers for a position can be made at any time but a reply cannot be required prior to December 1. However, you do have the option of accepting or

rejecting the offer before that date if you have made your decision.

You may be lucky enough to be offered positions at several different institutions. Congratulations! The first step is to contact each program to thank them for their generous offer. If you're not prepared to answer immediately, tell the program that you need some time to think and weigh your options. However, another scenario may consist of getting an offer from a program in which you're *somewhat* interested, but not getting an offer from a program in which you're *very* interested. Should that be the case, feel free to contact the program that you're very interested in but that you haven't heard from yet, and talk to them about your standing. It is better to talk about the process with them outright, than to accept an offer elsewhere because you fear you won't get another one. And remember that you should not feel pressured to make your decision prior to December 1.

The skills that you have perfected during your residency, namely your communication skills, will serve you well during this process. Being up-front and open is the best policy, and keeping open lines of communication is very important throughout the application and interviewing process. After all, you may work with these people throughout your career! Overall, it is best to be courteous and timely in your acceptance or declination of offers. Institutions may be disappointed, but will understand a polite and timely "no." And, of course, once you've accepted a position, it is highly recommended that you let the other programs know so they aren't left waiting.

Once You Accept a Position

Congratulations — you were offered a position, and accepted it! You are now an incoming fellow in psychosomatic medicine for the next academic year. Once you accept a position, be sure to inform your current residency program of any pertinent timelines. Most fellowships start on July 1, but if you need a few days off to move or for orientation, be sure to check with your residency program about this.

There are many issues to be clarified prior to starting fellowship, most of which can be clarified by the individual fellowship program. You should find out which permanent licenses you will need prior to starting your fellowship (individual states, District of Columbia). You also need to know if it is mandatory that you get a permanent DEA number prior to starting fellowship. If you need to get licenses and/or a DEA

number, *act quickly*. Some processes may take months to be completed, and you don't want to jeopardize your fellowship by not being fully accredited. Check the website for the Federation of State Medical Boards (www.fsmb.org) and go to the "Public Services" tab. There you will find a link to all state medical boards, and their individual contact information. If you need to get your own DEA number, check the website for the DEA (www.dea diversion.usdoj.gov) to get specific information.

You may have chosen to stay at your home institution (where you did your residency) for fellowship. You may have decided to move to a new location. The following are things to think about if you are planning to relocate for fellowship.

Housing – For a one-year position, housing can be a tricky decision. Should you buy, or rent, or live with friends/family? If you think that you'd like to remain in the area after fellowship, you may want to consider purchasing a home. If you are undecided or think you might like to move after fellowship, renting or living with friends/family may be a wiser financial decision. Several things to consider regarding housing include location (distance to work locations, distance to public transportation systems like subway or metro, how long you should anticipate being in traffic each day), traffic patterns (will you be heading into terrible traffic every rush-hour?), price, other amenities (does the apartment complex include a gym, laundry facilities, etc?). In this process, it will be important to investigate various moving company options to facilitate your relocation.

Banking – Again, if you're moving for only one year, should you change all your financial holdings? Or, just get a new bank for checking account/direct deposit purposes?

Benefits, such as health insurance – Your fellowship program should be able to supply this information to you. You likely will have a chance to sign up for benefits during a formal orientation session. Check with your residency institution to verify how long your residency benefits last after graduation or, if necessary, inquire about a COBRA plan to extend benefits if there is a lapse between residency and fellowship insurance plans.

Other issues – You may need to find childcare or employment for a spouse or significant other. Ask your fellowship program if there are particular resources that they know about, or people to talk to in order to help with these issues.

Wrapping Up

We hope this guide has been useful to those of you contemplating fellowship training. There may be aspects of the application process that we have omitted in this brief guide, but hopefully we have armed you with some of the tools you need to start the process with confidence. Overall, we hope you remember the following:

Be prompt throughout this process: in researching fellowships, contacting programs for information, applying, interviewing, and responding to offers.

Be open and polite in all facets of communication – with fellowship program coordinators, interviewers, and active fellows.

Be thorough in your investigations, and be clear in your drive to pursue the best possible fellowship program match for your particular interests.

Be yourself, and you surely will succeed!