LETTERS

A Faculty Member on Match Day

To the Editor. I wake before the alarm and stare at the ceiling for a bit. I am thinking about how many pharmacy students across the country are doing the same thing. It is 5:15 AM on Match Day. In just a few short hours the fates of thousands of students and hundreds of residency programs will be sealed with an e-mail that will simply list the results of the Pharmacy Residency Match.¹

As a faculty member who is involved with multiple residency programs at my institution, I am anxious for many reasons. My thoughts first go to the students who are the residency candidates. I have engaged in conversations with students all year regarding pieces of the puzzle that come together today. I have been talking about this day with some of these students since their first year in the pharmacy program. Others, I have just gotten to know during their final year at the college, as they are finding their path and gaining momentum to begin their career. I anticipate many of them will match, but I know that some of them will not. I sense their anticipation, for the complexities that they are not doing this by themselves, which provides security, competition, empathy, and jealousy. Friends and significant others will all find out at roughly the same time the great news, good news, or news that will leave them shocked, confused, and tearful. How will the news be shared? I assist with a Scramble Support program at the college of pharmacy; I field phone calls and e-mails from students who have not matched and are looking for advice and direction. Throughout the morning, I think about who I may be talking with during the day. I realize the possibility that there will be students at our institution who ranked our college of pharmacy-based programs and both the student and the program will find themselves in the scramble.

As I arrive at work, I know the e-mails should come out in the next half hour. I am wondering which of these candidates will end up matching at our institution. Who will sit in the residency office just down the hall from me, serving as my immediate office suite community for the next year? How will my colleagues feel when the results come out? My office is next to the Residency Director for all of our college residencies, so I know how our program has fared as soon as it is released. The director and I celebrate and begin strategizing for one of the programs that did not match.

Within 30 minutes after the e-mails arrive, I am receiving a call on my cell phone from a student who did not match. I also receive text messages and e-mails from students telling me they did match and where. I debrief with other faculty members throughout the morning regarding who has connected with which students who have and have not matched, as well as local and national residency programs that have not matched. The hallways are buzzing with faculty connecting, celebrating, and offering support for students who need it. I realize very little of the rest of my to-do list is going to get done today. The emotions with each phone call, e-mail, and hallway conversation go from excitement to pride to disappointment to surprise and around and around again.

As I talk with students about the opportunity that presents through not matching, I am excited for them to be able to step out of the rat race and the linear career path they may have been following. I sincerely believe that not matching is the best thing that could happen for many if not all students. They get a chance to reflect and think completely differently about what they want next year and where they ultimately want to be, which is exciting and scary. It is too early for any of them or even me to fully embrace the optimism in these new prospects. We all need time to mourn, to feel the disappointment, and then to move forward purposefully. For me as a faculty member, I worry about how I prepared these students. Did I do everything I could to put them in a position to put their best selves forward through the residency application process? As I talk with students today, am I doing it the right way, in a way that tells them it's OK to cry, but also encourages them to move forward thoughtfully? How can I do it better next year?

By 3:00 PM, I am emotionally drained. How can I grumble about my emotions on this day? If I am spent, then I cannot imagine how they feel. I talk to another student who is trying to decide to scramble or not on my drive home. As the day comes to a close, I think about the next few days and the next week and what everyone (residency programs, candidates that matched, and those that didn't) will be experiencing months from now – the next step.

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REFERENCE

1. ASHP Resident Matching Program. <https://www.natmatch.com/ashprmp/>. Accessed April 9, 2014.