



The Five-Minute Mentor: How Do We Attract High-Quality Residents?

I am a residency program director at a small academic medical center. I admit that my AMC is not a “top-tier” center, and we have recently had trouble attracting residents to our program. Although we have been able to fill all the positions in our program—mostly with graduates of our own medical school—we would like to broaden our applicant pool and attract better-quality residents from other schools. What strategies would you suggest for accomplishing this?

First, conduct an “appreciative self-study” of your program: What characteristics, strengths, and values set it apart? To spread the word about what your program has to offer, consider: (1) working with your information technology and public relations departments to design a Web site and a brochure that appeals to this age group; (2) networking with likely deans of students; (3) encouraging your residents to become more active recruiters within their networks.

—**Janet Bickel, MA**

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1. Diagnose the problem: One needs to understand the real reasons behind why students choose not to come to this residency program. Surveying those who interviewed with you but chose to go elsewhere would be a great start.

2. Package your program: Students base their program choices on their gut feelings. Location is a critical factor. Sell your location by making sure there is information regarding activities for young people and those with young families. Then sell your program. Make sure you have answers to all questions—recent papers, awards, national presentations, brochures, schedules, fun events, retreats, and the like—scattered in a conference room where people can look through them.

3. Advertise your program: Several schools have career advising events for their medical students. Participate in local events. Have a user-friendly and up-to-date

Web site. Candidates often use these Web sites as a primary resource.

4. Know your key message: Fine-tune your “elevator conversation” regarding your residency program. What are the four or five key aspects of your program that are special or distinguishing? Use a faculty and resident retreat to figure this message out. Once you have the key message, coach your residents and faculty members on it.

5. Follow up: Aggressively pursue candidates that you liked and are likely to join you. Call them. Write them personalized follow-up notes.

6. Involve the department chair: The department chair can be a key ally in recruitment. Often candidates who are personally called by the chair feel very welcomed and are likely to consider that program in a more positive light.

—**Latha Chandran, MD, MPH**

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Having graduates from your own school select your residency means that you must be offering exciting and effective clerkships and communicating effectively with the student affinity group.

As to gaining greater visibility with students from other medical schools, leading to a more diverse resident cohort, here are some tips:

❖ Be sure your Web site is up to date and “inviting”—and that a key-word search

in your discipline draws your program as one of the “first page” results.

❖ Provide the student affairs offices (and the program director in your discipline) at other comparable institutions with information about your program.

❖ If you are getting a good amount of expressed interest in your program, and a fair number of students come to interview but do not rank your program high enough to match, do follow-up inquiries to determine why they did not rank you higher.

❖ When your faculty are invited to give grand rounds elsewhere, make it a condition of their visit that they get to meet with the other schools’ student affinity groups in your discipline. They can speak about the benefits of your program and generate interest in a visit.

❖ Invite students from elsewhere to do a senior elective in your discipline and cultivate their interest in a residency position.

—**David J. Bachrach, FACMPE/FACHE**

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You have raised an important question, and one that many other residency program directors face as well. Unlike Lake Wobegon (where all the children are “above average”), not every AMC is “top tier” and not all residency programs are heavily subscribed. So, the reality is that many programs end up competing for the same pool of applicants. Your goal is appropriate: Expand the

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applicant pool and attract higher-quality students. Recognize that your efforts will take several years to see results, but setting a goal, identifying strategies, and developing a plan will move you methodically in the right direction. Here are several strategies to get started.

Step 1: Perform a self-assessment/SWOT analysis of your program.

Step 2: Identify your “ideal” target audience, and go after those who are most likely to be attracted to your program.

Step 3: Market your program. In this era, a strong Web presence is critical.

The next step in the marketing phase is to cultivate your internal audience. An important goal that you didn't mention is to recruit the best applicants from your school. Recognize that graduates from your own

school are beneficial in that you “know” them and they “know” you. Consider what you can do to woo those excellent candidates who are right in your backyard. The faculty of your training program must be aware of the important role that they play in recruitment throughout the year when they are working with students. Enlist their help and support in a team effort to improve the quality of the residency program through a strategy to recruit the best from your own.

Finally, some external marketing may be helpful. You can send promotional materials via direct mail to those in the student affairs offices and request that they forward these to interested students. A personal contact in the offices will increase the likelihood of effective dissemination of your materials.

Another marketing strategy used by some is participation in student “fairs” that are organized by institutions and/or student organizations. Although we have not found this to be a particularly effective strategy, you may want to consider some targeted efforts in this area.

—**Luanne E. Thorndyke, MD**

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