

Orthopaedic Away Rotations: Number, Cost, and What Matters to Applicants

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INTRODUCTION:

Fourth-year away rotations are increasingly important for orthopaedic residency applications. While these provide opportunities to evaluate programs and applicants, they require considerable time and financial investment. The current average number and overall cost to complete away rotations is not known. Similarly, what matters to applicants when determining where to apply for rotations and how away rotation experiences influence rank order list is poorly understood.

METHODS:

Applicants to two orthopaedic residencies in the Philadelphia metroplex received surveys regarding number and cost of away rotations, factors affecting rotation site selection, and the influence of people/experiences on rank order list. To limit response bias, surveys were only available between the rank list certification deadline and match week. Descriptive statistics were performed on the entire cohort. Responses were compared between gender and applicant type (allopathic versus osteopathic) using chi-square tests for categorical data and t-tests or Mann-Whitney U tests for interval data.

RESULTS:

One-hundred-and-ninety out of 936 (20.3%) applicants completed the survey. 133 (70%) respondents completed four or more rotations. 57 (30.0%) respondents stated their rotation time was limited by cost, with 116 (61.1%) reporting an average monthly cost >\$1600. Geographic location (mean importance [standard deviation, SD] = 4.3 out of 5 [1.0]), program reputation (3.9 [1.0]), and word of mouth (3.8 [1.0]) were most important when selecting rotation sites, while social media presence (1.9 [1.0]), scholarship opportunities 2.1 [1.3], and program website (2.5 [1.1]) were least important. Women valued program diversity more than men (3.6 [1.1] vs 2.5 [1.3], $p < 0.001$), and osteopathic applicants valued program history of matching similar applicants more than allopathic applicants (4.1 [1.0] vs 3.5 [1.2], $p < 0.01$). Residents (4.8 [0.7]) were the most influential people when determining rank order.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

Orthopaedic applicants in the 2024 match cycle reported an increase in number and cost of away rotations compared to prior reports. With an estimated overall cost exceeding \$6400, applicants frequently stated cost limited their time on rotations. This may disadvantage individuals with limited financial resources and confound an equitable review of applicants. Our findings also highlight what matters to applicants when selecting away rotations and determining their rank order. This should help programs better direct recruitment efforts and provide a more applicant-focused away rotation experience.