

The National Mentorship Match Algorithm: Mentors Needed

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INTRODUCTION

Mentorship is a key factor for dermatology residency match success.¹ However, dermatology mentor demand grossly exceeds supply, especially for dermatology residency applicants who are underrepresented in medicine (UIM) and/or without home dermatology programs.^{2,3} To this end, we (Dr Friedman and Dr Veerabagu) created the National Mentorship Match Algorithm (NMMA), a free, tailored mentorship program to help mitigate unmet mentorship demand.

The National Mentorship Match Algorithm uses a novel, automated algorithm (Dr SAV) to pair dermatology residency applicants (mentees) with dermatology mentors based on distinct applicant needs and interests. The National Mentorship Match Algorithm prioritizes UIM dermatology residency applicants and/or those without home dermatology programs. To date, over 600 NMMA mentees have gained access to valuable mentorship over the past 4 application cycles, with 93.4% of mentees expressing that the tailored algorithm mentor match was particularly helpful and 83.6% of them reporting that their NMMA mentors reduced application anxiety. As of July 2023, 89 out of 101 NMMA 2020 to 2021 mentees were second-year dermatology residents.⁴

In contrast to for-profit mentorship programs, NMMA does not require mentee payment or prerequisite application. NMMA's automated algorithm means that the sole limiting factor is the number of volunteer mentors. NMMA mentor eligibility includes all who have successfully matched into dermatology in the recent or distant future: dermatology residents, sub-specialist fellows, and academic and community dermatologists/sub-specialists. To "pay it forward," NMMA requests that mentees who have successfully matched into dermatology serve as mentors for the subsequent NMMA cycle. While ideal in thought, unfortunately, this proves impossible to enforce in practice due to NMMA's free model.

The National Mentorship Match Algorithm continues to extend thanks to our volunteers and volunteer mentors. The requirement for the NMMA mentor includes a 1-hour Zoom or phone call in which they answer their mentee's questions. While

not necessary, NMMA mentors in the past have graciously agreed to help more than one mentee (with some helping 10+ mentees). To dissipate any expectations or awkwardness, mentors involved in academia (and/or dermatology residency programs) are considered 'de-affiliated' from their specific program. In the past, NMMA mentors have greatly enjoyed the process, with many of them volunteering for multiple application cycles. This speaks to studies indicating that physicians with positive mentorship experiences are more likely to experience improved professional and personal development.⁵

The National Mentorship Match Algorithm not only supports diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in dermatology, but fosters inter-generational collaboration between seasoned and brand-new (future) dermatologists. For example, one former NMMA mentee, who successfully matched into dermatology as a re-applicant, still meets with her former NMMA mentor for coffee whenever she happens to be in her former mentor's area since the two happened to become friends through the process. Other mentors and mentees reconnect at annual dermatology conferences as well. We hope that all dermatology residents, fellows, and academic/community dermatologists/sub-specialists are encouraged to sign up for at least one NMMA mentee for the 2024 to 2025 dermatology residency application process at this link: <https://forms.gle/skEDFwUEyQBMP4GK6>.

DISCLOSURES

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