The Match: Unscrambling the SOAP (Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program)

Notifying Designated Institutional Official (DIO) and Program Directors (PDs)

1. Meet with program directors / DIO - fall 2011
   • Review the NRMP Match dates for 2012
   • Give overview of SOAP timeline (handout & web links)
     o Monday unmatched and unfilled information released simultaneously, then a time out period
     o Monday/Tuesday applications transmitted free of charge, phone interviews, finalize preference lists in R3 system
     o Weds noon R3 system sends first offers to applicants
     o NOTE: A Program Director can reach out to a student, BUT a student cannot reach out to a PD unless the PD has been counseling the student throughout medical school
   • Present at DIO / program directors’ education meeting

2. Identify 1-2 program directors to liaison with Student Affairs

3. Identify staff for the DIO who will coordinate
   • Information with Program Directors
   • Communication with program director staff
   • Begin discussions of SOAP planning for unfilled slots

4. Prior to Match week the liaison program directors should:
   • Confirm program directors or designees are available
   • Review SOAP planning including
     o Only ERAS applications are accepted
     o Plan for reviewing and ranking ERAS applications
     o Necessity to make offers through SOAP until Friday. R3 will allow programs to offer unfilled positions, and will establish an electronic ‘handshake’
     o PDs not required to fill positions during the match

Selecting and Preparing Home Institution Faculty Who are Needed to Assist Un-Matched Students with SOAP:

1. Consider selecting a group of “required faculty” who are scheduled to attend the student affairs office or SOAP “command center” beginning on Monday at Noon.
   - Medicine
   - Surgery
   - Other
2. Consider identifying a group of faculty who can be “on-call” in the event of an unmatched applicant in their specialty, or an applicant who wants to consider an alternative specialty through SOAP. Such faculty can be called between Monday at noon and Wednesday morning if the need arises.

- Other Large Specialties (Peds, OB, Psych, Fam.Med., Emed.)
- High Risk Specialties (Ortho., ENT, Radiology, Anes., etc.)

3. Prepare comprehensive list of all of these required and ‘on call’ faculty with contact info. Send out multiple reminders in advance!

4. Introduction to SOAP- Your required and on-call faculty will need education on the new SOAP format including the following:

- Rationale
- Timeline
- Application offer sequence and timing
- Time-sensitive advising of students with deans- Mon. 12-2 PM

Preparing Students for the SOAP:

1. December through early March
   - Monitor students in ERAS to identify students who are risk for not matching. Monitor number of interviews that his risk students have done towards the end of the interview period.
   - Provide proactive counseling to students who are at a high risk, well in advance of match week, working with student affairs and specialty advisors. Work with students to have a secondary (backup) plan
   - Provide information to students in advance of the match week about how they will receive information if they do not match and how the SOAP process will work.
   - Obtain a commitment well in advance of the SOAP period from individual faculty in the departments to monitor students during the scramble process.
   - Insure a commitment from the institution to provide both individual and group counseling to non-matched student

2. Immediately prior to the SOAP period
   - Prepare to provide a safe and private environment for students to seek advice in a confidential setting and develop procedures to insure privacy for non-matched students, for example closing the student affairs office to other students during the scramble period.
   - Set up a meeting for Monday with students, and faculty mentors to review the process for the SOAP, to support students and to begin counseling about approaches to the scramble.
   - Insure adequate computer, phone and fax resources for each non-matched student, for example assign each student and faculty mentor to a room with these resources.
   - Set up a system for Monday to make contact with students who do not match, either calling the students or providing a contact number for them to call.
   - Encourage the non-matched student to consider who they will bring to the pre-SOAP and SOAP process (e.g. significant other or peer or faculty advocate).
• Have staff available to make a printed copy of all ERAS documents on Monday. This should be provided to the faculty mentor who is helping the student through the match and available to the student affairs office for faxing on Tuesday, if requested by the program. In order to insure the confidentiality of the letters of recommendation, this set of documents should not be given to students.

• Make it clear to non-matched students how the match day will be handled for them with the goal that these students should not be able to be identified as “different”, for example all students should receive an envelope on match day. Since final contracts for the student in SOAP may not be available immediately, there should be some written documentation confirming that there was an offer and that the student has accepted.

What to do in the 2-hour window before ERAS reopens?

1. Advise all of your students to think about this contingency. However, identify your “at risk” students ahead of time and sit down one-on-one to discuss possible strategies and emphasize the need to act rapidly and be decisive. Advise them to also discuss the need for rapid decisions with spouses or significant others ahead of time. There may not be much time for discussion with these individuals during the first round of SOAP. Advise the students to select a medical student partner to assist them on Monday rather than a spouse or family member.

2. Recruit some additional staff members or faculty to be ready to work individually with students to help them rapidly identify programs with openings and get them going on submitting their applications. Brief the faculty members carefully on what will be occurring, what is permissible, etc. Check on the availability of these faculty members or others over a 3 day period.

3. Instruct the students to come to the designated SOAP location immediately if they learn that they are unmatched. Don’t wait for calls from the Student Affairs office. Choose a location with easy access for students and faculty that has adequate privacy and computer support.

4. Once the students arrive, have support staff print their ERAS application and letters of recommendation for faculty members to review when they are helping the students.

5. Encourage the unmatched student to apply to the maximum number of programs (30) allowed in the first round of ERAS (if there are sufficient openings). Once they send off the ERAS applications, have the students go back and put together a spread sheet with facts about the programs they applied to. They can then research the programs in more depth to prepare for possible interviews. They can also “rank” the programs so they are prepared to respond if they get multiple offers.

6. Encourage them to be flexible in their thinking. If there are unfilled positions in their chosen specialty and the student still wants to pursue that specialty, they may have to apply to programs in locations that are less appealing or don’t fit all of their original parameters. The same flexibility may be needed if their Plan B specialty does not have many openings.

7. Be sure you have enough administrative staff support to assist students with ERAS issues. Reserve enough space and computers for the students to be able to work rapidly.
8. Prepare for the contingency of an off campus student. Skype, text, email or phone many all be possibilities.

**Advising Students During the Rolling SOAP Process**

1. Provide an outline and timeline prior to SOAP to all students
2. Work with unmatched students to develop a strategy prior to submitting applications through ERAS for SOAP
   - Same specialty
   - Alternative specialty/specialties
   - Combination
3. Encourage students to review unfilled residency program information on line and have readily available during SOAP
   - Review and consider as students apply to programs
   - Accessible during the interviewing process so students may ask educated questions during the interview
   - May also be used to help select a program if multiple offers are made during an offer round
4. During or after applying to residency programs, students should develop a preference list of their own following discussion with significant other(s), faculty, and student affairs dean
   - In my “fantasy come true world,” how would I rank my 30 programs?
5. Develop a “what if” strategy
   - “What if I prefer Program A, but Program B or C offers me a position during the first offer round?”
     - Remind students that “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” – SOAP simulation suggests that most positions will be taken within the first few rounds
     - Remind students of the binding nature of the NRMP Match Participation Agreement
6. Develop a plan for Day Two
   - Strategize on how best to use the 10 additional applications through ERAS? How about the 5 additional applications through ERAS on day three?
7. Encourage the unmatched student to have a medical student assist during the rolling SOAP process
   - Too many student assistants can be problematic
   - Family members, especially parents, may be problematic as well
8. Encourage and model calm optimism throughout process

**TIPS FOR HANDLING THE UNMATCHED STUDENT**

1. Grief Counseling
   - Faculty advisor
   - Student Affairs Dean
   - Clergy
• Mentor
• Friends and significant others

2. Options
• Master’s degree—MPH, MBA, MS
• Research

3. Graduate or not?
• considerations

4. Follow up
• Match following year
• MSPE considerations
• Counseling the post graduate
  o Making rational choices
  o Need to do something different to get a different result
  o Alternative plans