



American Society of
Anesthesiologists™

Residents in a Room
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(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

VOICE OVER:

This is Residents in a room, an official podcast of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, where we go behind the scenes to explore the world from the point of view of anesthesiology residents.

It's a gut feeling. It's a place where you know you're going to be happy.

One of the most important parts of my application is how genuine it was and I think that's something I really tried to carry into the interview process.

You've given your heart and your soul to the specialty, and you really want to match into it.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

Welcome to this special episode of Residents in a Room, the podcast for residents, by residents. I'm Carolyn Mensching, ASA's Senior Member Engagement Manager. And today, we're going behind the scenes with three medical students to explore their Match Day experience. We spoke with our guests in December as they were going through interviews, again in February as they submitted their rank lists, and finally around Match Day. For this peek behind the curtain, we were joined by...

NATALIE KOONS:

Hi, I'm Natalie Koons, fourth year medical student, former past president of the ASA medical student component. And I'm currently finishing up my fourth year at the University of New England.

IMAN SULIMAN:

My name is Iman Suliman and I am a fourth year medical student at Jefferson in Philadelphia. So excited to have applied for anesthesiology residency. After I finish residency, I hope to pursue pediatric Anesthesiology fellowship.

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

So my name is Savannah Whitfield, and I go to the Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine, and I'm a fourth year and I'm originally from Montana. And I'm applying for anesthesiology and I'm hopeful for the match, so we'll find out soon.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

In our December calls, we asked how the process was going. We wanted to know if they understood the process well enough, or if there were things they wish they understood better.

NATALIE KOONS:

The biggest mystery is how the programs rank applicants. You know, once you get an interview, it's super exciting to be able to interview with leaders in the field at this specific program, interact with residents. I felt like I have clicked with many different programs. I think my biggest question is where do I lie on their radar and where do I lie on their rank list? I think these questions are normal to be thinking about at this point in the application process, but it's also nerve wracking and anxiety inducing just because you don't know exactly where you lie on any of these programs lists.

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

You kind of adapt this process to yourself and kind of how you're going to approach this. It's very individualistic. I know that there are certain guidelines that we should kind of follow, but overall, this is a process that each one of us has to go through and kind of adapt to whichever circumstances you're in.

I didn't realize how big away rotations were in applying for the match process. That's something that I wish I would have had better understanding in. I feel like in anesthesia they're becoming a bigger component to the match process, especially with things transitioning into it all being virtually and online. So that's something that's going forward and to applicants in the future is that I would definitely apply to these rotations and really strategically think about, okay, which programs do I actually want to go to and apply to those for rotations too, because those are the people that you're going to be working with and in the future. So if you develop those close relationships with them during your way rotations, it's phenomenal in the application process and you really get good mentorship through those, through those as well.

IMAN SOLIMAN:

I would say the biggest thing that I'm probably still really not entirely clear on and haven't gotten a straight answer about is post interview communications. So I've had some programs say no thank you notes and okay, that's fine. But then I've also had a couple of programs saying no love letters, no letters of intent. And I guess once I get to January and I start making my rankings exactly how I see them, I'm not really sure what communication I'm supposed to have with any of the programs.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

We asked what resources they were relying on, and where they turned for help when puzzled by the process.

IMAN SOLIMAN:

So I would say mentors and residents at various programs have really been my two biggest guiding lights.

I think mentorship is really important in anesthesiology and it really does open a lot of doors. And I can truthfully say that I would not be where I am without the support of so many mentors. And I think their advice has been a really guiding light for me during this process, which can be very difficult.

The other group that I turn to is the residents at different programs. So kind of off the camera, off the books, asking them different questions about their programs, why they chose their programs, and even, you know, in some instances being like if you had to compare program A or B, why did you pick A over B? And I think that is something that a lot of them are pretty honest about.

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

I really developed a strong relationship with an anesthesiologist at my school who was hired on his faculty. So I reached out to him a lot in this process. And it didn't matter which question I had or I was like, Hey, I'm a little bit confused on this statement. In my personal statement, can you read it over and can you give kind of give me some feedback on how what you think of. It in your take and or if there was I really like this program, what are your thoughts?

Having a lot of different mentors too is really important. Having those different mentors at that are in different aspects of their life, whether that be in their first year residency or

their 30 year residency, as they're about to just go out into their first attending job or people who have been in anesthesiology for years, I think it's important to get those different mentors to have that different perspective and really see that longitudinal progression throughout anesthesiology and see what's working for them at that point in their life.

NATALIE KOONS:

So I've relied on current residents at specific programs and I am one to just cold email individuals from the program and ask them for advice. And I think with the virtual nature of recruitment season and how interviews are going this year, really getting to know the residents from the programs and asking them the questions prior to the interview has been super helpful. Helpful for me, just to kind of get a feel of some of maybe some of the individuals that I'll be interviewing with, maybe some of the questions that they may ask, but also just talking to them about the different culture of the program. Maybe some questions that you have specifically about the residency schedule. And I feel like talking to them prior to the interview for me has helped prepare both the material, but then also how the interview will go and what to expect.

I've also utilized my specific mentors in anesthesiology as well as advisors from my medical school. And then also just talking to other applicants has been very helpful. So some of my friends that are also applying to anesthesia, they may have had a weird question that they came across that we share with each other to kind of get a feel for what kind of questions are being asked on the interview trail.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

Asked how they prepared for interviews, our interviewees told us...

NATALIE KOONS:

So early on in the interview season, I think it's really important to prepare your application in a way that, you know, every single detail on that application. If you put something on your application, then it's open for conversation and it's open for questions. And so if you had a project six or seven years ago, you should probably review that project and know every detail about that project. And so preparing my application, you know, going through all of the things that I had accomplished, all of the projects, all of the leadership and community service that I had done throughout medical school and even prior to medical school. And then also, you know, talking with individuals, maybe it's with your family members or your friends, just talking through some of the things on your application to get used to speaking about it. Once you go

through interview season, I think after my third or fourth interview, you kind of get the spiel down about your research or about why anesthesiology. The more you do interviews, the more comfortable you get talking about it, the more fluid it is.

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

I feel like each interview has kind of helped me adapt to better prepare for the next interview. I actually did a couple of mock interviews, so I reached out to my school through the faculty and conducted a mock interview. There was also, there was a couple of medical students and we all got together and we would practice together. So we would kind of do this on WebEx and simulate the environment as a whole, and we would have random questions and we would just ask each other questions. So you can kind of bounce ideas off of each other and be like, Hey, how does this sound? Or am I coming across how I should? This is how I want to portray myself and really kind of working together. That's kind of what helped me best prepare for these and kind of alleviate some of that anxiety.

IMAN SOLIMAN:

So I'm honestly kind of embarrassed to talk about it because I actually feel that I really tried hard not to overprepare. I really felt that one of the most important parts of my application is how genuine it was, and I think that's something I really tried to carry into the interview process that I have brought genuine. I guess what's the noun for genuine, you know, being genuine and honesty to everything that I have done. And I've really only done things that I am passionate about and that I feel I can speak well about. I really try to kind of stay in my own little bubble and focus on what's best for me, because what's best for me is not what's best for everyone else.

I would definitely say I feel a bit more polished now towards these interviews that I had at the end compared to those first couple where it was definitely still trying to get a hang of things. You know, I know certain questions, I changed my answer, you know, interview number one compared to interview number eight.

CAROLYN MENCSCHING:

We also wanted to understand how they were ranking programs...

NATALIE KOONS:

I'm currently in that process of figuring out what my rank list will be. The greatest advice that I've gotten is it's really a feel for the specific program. It's a gut feeling. It's a place

where you know you're going to be happy. It's a location where you know you're going to be happy. Whether that means for you that you're close to family or exploring a new area where you might not have family. And then also, you know how the program can support your vision of your career goal. And so for me, I'm very interested in academic medicine and continuing doing research throughout residency and beyond. And so looking for a program that will really support my vision of becoming a clinician scientist in anesthesiology and providing the infrastructure for the things that I want to do is super important. And that has been clear and evident for many different programs throughout my interview season. In addition, I think for me personally, family is super important for me. And so having somebody, whether that is a family friend or immediate family within the vicinity within a few hour drive or even a short plane ride is super important for me. My partner will be moving with me, so I'll always have his support. But having some kind of support system within the area is is very important to me.

SAVANNAH G:

I was doing how a lot of medical students were doing was that they would create a huge Excel spreadsheet and create details. But for me, I felt like there was a lot of stress going through with that, that process. So I changed it up. At the end of the interview, I think and I write down some notes just based upon like the overall impression. One of the biggest components is how well did you get along with the people, the faculty and the residents? Because those are the people who are going to inspire and motivate you throughout this process and throughout residency. So for me, that's probably the one thing that I'm writing about the most and really reflecting on is like how what was your interaction with this residency program and were you happy at the end of your interview? And do you think this is a place that you can really thrive and be productive? I'm creating a more of a fluid ranked list. It's not set in stone right now, but just saying, okay, this is what I liked about this program and maybe this is why they're number three or this is why I like this program, Pros and Cons, and this is why they're ranked number ten. It changes almost every day. And then I think closer to the ranked list, I'll sit down, maybe like think about it for like a good a week or two and really process that before the ranked list is due.

IIMAN SOLIMON:

So I would say the first thing that I'm typically looking at is like the size of the academic program. I'm definitely looking for a bigger program where I feel that I'll have a lot of different opportunities and kind of not one where I've to fit exactly within a certain mold, but kind of have the flexibility to do what I want and investigate different subspecialties. I'm particularly interested in pedes, so that's always a plus for me when a program has good pediatric anesthesiology opportunities.

Location is important to me. If they're not local enough for me, I think they're really just not going to work and they'll be closer to the bottom of my rank list. My family is pretty local. So they are in Pennsylvania, my in-laws are in Virginia. So kind of hopefully falling somewhere between those two, on the East Coast. For me it's program and where I feel I'll have the most opportunities while taking into account location for my support system and for my spouse.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

Because it's new this year, we wanted to get their thoughts on signaling, a recently implemented procedure that allows each student to signal 5 programs to emphasize their interest...

IMAN SOLIMON:

I think the goal of the signals is to kind of decrease that need for people to just try to stack programs for the sake of stacking and kind of force people to be more and more deliberate about the programs that they're choosing and not just checking them because they're all good programs, but checking them because they're programs that you like and programs that you actually see yourself going to. There are different strategies to using the signals, but I think they will be more helpful than hurtful.

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

We're only given five signals. And so if you signal a program that shows that you really, really want to go to that program and that you have an interest. So I think using these strategically. And when you signal a program, you're like, really think like, am I competitive for this program? And what really kind of sparks you about that program and what interests you in really using those to show how interested you are?

NATALIE KOONS:

For me personally, I've encountered a lot of different faculty and program directors who have said that they used signaling for interview invites only and that they will not be using it for ranking, although we don't know what they do behind the scenes when they do create their rank list. So this is somewhat of a mystery to me personally, and I'm sure there's other applicants who are curious about how they use the signals. But then I've also come across individuals who haven't used the signals at all and have taken more of a holistic approach to reviewing applicants and not putting them in that specific box. And so I'm curious as to what the other students and other applicants perspective is on how

they use their ranking or their signals, rather, and if they would change anything about how they went about it.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

And of course, we couldn't let them off the sofa without learning about their fears...

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

So I think there's a lot of anxiety that goes into this. In that you've given your heart and your soul to the specialty. And you really want to match into it. And for me, you kind of want to go somewhere that's really going to make you happy, where you really like the people.

NATALIE KOONS:

The biggest fear is not matching. And you know, with the increasing competitiveness of anesthesiology and the increasing applications, especially with virtual interviews, it scares a lot of students that they apply to however many programs and they still don't match. Another fear is not matching at your desired place, whether that be your first choice or within your top five

IMAN SOLIMON:

I would say number one is kind of that difficulty trying to find the program where I feel I will be the best fit. And I have found that my thoughts before the interview process are very different than my thoughts now. I'm almost done with the interview process. And then I think kind of second to that, so let's say I finally do select the one that I feel is the perfect fit for me, well, I might not get it. So I would say those are probably the two big things that really keep me up at night.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

They all had a plan b ... and some had a plan c, d, and e as well...

NATALIE KOONS:

I think everyone has a plan B so to speak. I think what we're told from our mentors and our advisors is that you should be happy with every single program that you plan to rank when you submit your rank list. And so I think in hindsight, you know, being open and

being prepared for matching to any of the places on your list is always something that is in the back of your head.

IMAN SOLIMON:

I have a plan A, B, C, D, and E. There are a lot of things at this point that I'm taking into account besides even the program and how I fit, but things in my personal life. So my husband is not in medicine and he has a job where he works in person and different plans would affect our plans between me and him and what we'd have to do to make both of our careers work. I'm definitely looking for a program where I feel I'm a good fit and I will be successful for the next four years, while also ensuring that my husband is able to work on his career and be successful in the four years and that my career doesn't come at the cost of his.

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

This is this is what has my heart and my soul. And this is where I see myself doing like 20 years down the road. My backup plan was to either have a transitional year or a preliminary medicine year. I knew that these are kind of that if I didn't, if it's anesthesiology, didn't work out, that I could do these for a year and reapply for anesthesiology next year.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

We reconnected with our three guests in late February, around the time their rank lists were due. We wanted to find out how they were feeling, and if their rank lists were about what they expected at the outset or if they ended up surprising themselves with their choices.

IMAN SOLIMON:

So I'm just about done with my rank list, making some final changes today and tomorrow. the thing that I think surprised me the most, now versus me a couple of months ago, is that I think at this point I become a little bit more realistic about things and less idealistic. I'm definitely choosing the places that I would like the most. But I think more realistic factors like cost of living, proximity to my support system, and things like that have definitely determined how my rank list is turning out. Whereas maybe a little earlier on, I would have, you know, I'm ready to move to the opposite coast. I'm young, this is the time. And I still definitely am thinking like that, But I think I'm trying to be a little bit more realistic in my approach as well.

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

Sometimes there's days when I feel like, Oh, I'm okay. Like I know it's whichever program that I get matched to, I know that I'll be happy and I'll be able to be productive and I'll be happy with my career choice. And then there's other days where I'm like, Oh no, like what's going to happen? And there's that risk of not matching. It's kind of been like a roller coaster of emotions

My rank list didn't really change too much, like based upon my interviews. There's been kind of a couple of programs and I've kind of like, Oh, should I bump them up a little bit more or should I put them down a little bit more? And I had this I found this good idea on Twitter. It said to have little piece of paper and write down their name and put it in an envelope and open up one envelope each day leading up to the match. And so I started doing that. So I write down an I journal, my reaction based upon whichever envelope I open that day. And they were like, Create your rank list based upon that. Because if you open up that, it's kind of like prepping yourself for the actual day when you're actually going to open up that envelope and see that program and you'll kind of already be prepared for that reaction that you're going to get. So that's something that has been helping me finalize my rank list.

NATALIE KOONS:

I actually just submitted my rank list last night, which was very relieving to hit the certify button. I really let it sit for about two weeks, and I kept periodically checking it and seeing if my feelings had changed. And I would make one or two changes here and there. But overall, the rank list pretty much stayed the same, which is why I was pretty confident in submitting it yesterday.

I think it's very normal to feel hesitant about submitting the ranked list. It's a pretty normal feeling to kind of go back and forth, weigh your options and really, you know, dive into those deeper feelings about why a specific program. I have heard, you know, some past applicants have submitted and then have had regrets about maybe the specific city that they had ranked first. So really taking your time with this whole process and really weighing every single factor, I think is super important. And something that no one really teaches you in medical school or teaches you throughout this match process that it's a lot of self-introspection and self-discovery when kind of creating this list of possible places that will be potentially your future for the next five, six years. And something that I've been talking to with my friends as well is, you know, we're trying to make a decision of your 1, 2, 3 programs at the top of your list, but ultimately it's the match algorithm that makes that decision. And so at a certain point, once you feel confident enough with your list that you have, you kind of have to relinquish the power

and relinquish the control to the algorithm and just know that wherever you end up, it's meant to be.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

We asked what factors were top of mind when they made their final rank lists.

NATALIE KOONS

I was really looking for a program that had a close-knit family feel, also had the infrastructure to support my specific research interests in OB critical care anesthesiology. And so on the interview trail, I really got a sense for the programs who were able to support my specific vision and really were able to foster this career development for me. And ultimately it came down to gut feeling. It was really about the people who are going to support me the most. And I have felt this now through my interview interactions, asking questions outside of the interview itself, and then talking with faculty and residents from this program where I was like, Yes, this is going to be my number one, number two choice. But also, for me, I have a partner who's not in medicine. So looking at cities where he was able to potentially get a job was also very important. So there was a lot of different factors that come into the decision. But ultimately it comes down to where do you feel you're going to be the most supported. Where do you feel like you're going to be included. And how do you feel about the individuals that you've interacted with along the interview trail? And could you spend a significant amount of time with these individuals and be happy?

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

Ultimately I'm looking for somewhere where I'm going to be happy. I know when I'm surrounded by people that I really enjoy working with and in the environment where I can do my activities outside of medicine, I know that that's where I thrive. And so those are the programs that I really focused on and put more towards the top.

There were a couple of programs that I was surprised that I did put a little higher. And I think that that was because of location. Being close to family is important to me as well. And so there were there were a couple of programs that were that were up there. And I'm glad they're up there and I'd be thrilled to go to them.

IMAN SOLIMAN:

Location probably is one of the biggest ones that helped me narrow down the programs that I was interested in. And then after location, I would say probably second is where I

feel I fit within the program and how I feel that program would support me to become the best anesthesiologist. I think one of the really amazing things about anesthesiology is that all of the programs are amazing and really don't differ too much in terms of what they teach you. But what I really have found differs more is their approach to training residents and how they support residents not only inside of the OR, but also outside of the OR to kind of develop those other parts of our career that will really set us up for success in the long term.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

We wanted to know how the signaling played into their final lists. So we asked how that panned out, and if the programs they had signaled ended up on their list, and if so, did they top the list?

NATALIE KOONS:

For me personally, only two programs stayed at the top, which were programs that I did signal. And then if we're talking about my top five, there were three programs that I didn't signal both geography and program that ended up in my top five. When you're a third year and a fourth year, you think you may know where you want to go, but those feelings or perceptions may change based on whether you did a rotation there or just whether whether your interview went the way you wanted it to go or, you know, in exploring other programs, maybe another program is better fit for you. And so that was the scenario with me. Just some other programs were a better fit for what exactly I was looking for. And at the time of signaling, you don't have a lot of education about these programs besides looking at their websites. And so for me, the signaling wasn't the end all, be all when I was creating my rank list. I honestly haven't thought about the signaling since I submitted the signaling way back in July or August. And so this wasn't a huge factor in my application cycle

IMAN SOLIMAN:

Four out of my five stayed at the very top of my list in terms of where my signals were. I would say one kind of dropped a little bit and it ended up being for a location reason and that is why I dropped it a little lower. Now, I still absolutely love the program, and if I can't end up in the specific area I'm looking for, I would be happy and grateful to still end up at that program and lots of others. But I think it definitely came into play more when I was prioritizing where I realized what I thought maybe four or five six months ago is probably 80% of what I thought now, you know.

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

I had like three or four out of the five. The programs that I did signal did end up at the top. And because those were programs that I had originally had strong interest in. I've kind of stuck with those programs. There's been a couple that have been like way across the country that I actually put up on the top two. I feel like those were kind of the more the surprising ones. But definitely I would say all of those programs that I signaled were definitely in that top range.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

We asked how they're planning to spend match and if they understand the practicalities of match day, like how and when they'll get the news...

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

I really liked being around my classmates and everything. But this is a really personal choice. And that day I really wanted to focus it myself and cherish that moment. My boyfriend and I, we're going to go hiking and I just wanted to be really low stress, enjoy the day. Because I don't want to be anxious, like surrounded by my classmates, trying to like in the middle of a classroom, figuring out what we're going to do. So we're going to go on a hike. And he's going to look at it. He'll kind of just like rip off the Band-Aid and just tell me, because I know I'm kind of bad about that and that I could kind of procrastinate it and not be like, oh, let's not worry about it. Like and like, look at it like in an hour or whatnot. But I know having someone there to help me process through that is going to be really important.

NATALIE KOONS:

So the University of New England is putting on a match Day celebration on March 17th. So that week of match week, Monday the 13th, we get an email telling us whether or not we have matched and then we have to wait a grueling four days until Friday afternoon to find out where we are going. And so for the University of New England's celebration, it starts around 11 and they have some or d'oeuvres and some cocktails for your family and friends who are coming. And then you receive your envelope and they have a countdown right around noon where everybody kind of opens their letter, finds out where they're matching and celebrates with their family and friends.

IMAN SOLIMAN:

I've gone back and forth about this over the last couple of weeks because Match Day celebrations have already started being planned for at our school. And I think what I've

ultimately decided, which I think is not the popular opinion, is that I am going to open my match letter at home with my husband. There is a whole match ceremony and program at school where you get there, you sit down with all of your classmates, they give you a letter, you run out into the hallway. And I think what it really boiled down to me, is that no one's lives are really going to be affected besides myself and my husband. And I think us having the time and privacy to process that information in our own way before we feel forced to put on a certain face for others and kind of share that joy and excitement with others. I think first and foremost, I really want to prioritize how we feel about the decision.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

Finally, we asked how they planned to spend their next few weeks as they wait to match...

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

So I'm on a required emergency medicine rotation at the moment and it has a lot of assignments. And I also have an end of rotation examination. So I'm really focusing on that. I'm kind of glad I have this rotation when I do because it distracts me a little bit and gives me something to focus on outside of the match. I've also been taking care of myself, so going on lots of runs and also hanging out with my friends and talking with people too about the match. I feel like leaning on my classmates have been really important during this process and they're probably the closest ones who understand what I'm going through. So having people that talk it out and talk it out with people outside of medicine, I talk about it with my classmates, talk about it with faculty. Just leaning on everyone]at this moment is it's important.

IMAN SOLIMAN:

The anxiety definitely started really hitting, I think, more recently. You know, it wasn't something I felt as much before, but I think now as we're getting down to just a few weeks in terms of waiting, it's really starting to weigh on me and give me a little bit of stress. The big thing that I'm trying to remember is that even if I don't match at the exact couple programs I'm thinking of, I can really make a home in any program that I find. So I find myself really trying to find comfort in the people around me, particularly my husband. Spending time with him, spending time with family and friends, and actually I booked a bunch of trips. So I'm basically just going to be in different states until Match day, just kind of trying to stay as busy as possible. It's important to remember that we've done everything we can and nothing that we do right now or think right now or stress about right now is going to change the outcome of the decision. I just have to hit submit

on that rank list and then really try to focus on enjoying those small things in life because, you know, it's going to be a lot of those small things that kind of get pushed into the background when it comes time for residency. And I really want to make sure they're at the forefront of my life right now.

NATALIE KOONS:

My partner and I, we've been long distance for almost five years now, so we've had a countdown to match day, about 343 days out. So I have been counting down to Match Day for a very long time. So the next 20, what is it, four days now until match day will probably be the longest 24 days of my life. And now that some of my rotations are ending, I'm planning honestly just to relax, do yoga, visit my sister, and hang out with friends, and try to distract myself as much as I can. I do have a lot of family coming into Maine for the Match Day celebration, so that week of match will be filled with a lot of family and friends and celebrations.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

Finally, Match Day arrived. We were excited to hear their good news and find out how they were feeling.

IMAN SOLIMAN:

I am going to spend my intern year in Philadelphia, which is what I wanted because my husband is still working in Philadelphia and we didn't want to have him quit. And then I'll be going to Hopkins for anesthesiology.

I'm feeling very grateful. I am super happy and I feel like years and months of stress and anxiety have kind of been lifted off of me. And I'm really excited for the coming journey.

NATALIE KOONS:

I matched to Stanford.

I'm just so excited. When I opened my letter, I immediately started crying and it was tears of joy, of course. And my whole family came up to Maine along with my boyfriend's parents, and we had a huge celebration. So it was a lot of fun.

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

I'm so excited. I'm thrilled. I couldn't be happier.

I matched at my number one program, so I'm going to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. And I did an away rotation there. And I just I fell in love with it. And I love the people. I love the culture. And I'm super excited to be going there and training for the rest of, I guess, for the next four years.

CAROLYN MESCHING

We asked if the day was what they expected...

IMAN SOLIMAN:

I chose not to go to match Day at school, and I'm really happy with my decision. So my husband and I were home. We were just, like, on my phone waiting for the email, and it came in at 11:57, not 12. So we got it three minutes early and we opened it together. And I think it was surreal. Like I read it and I was like, Well, this is what I wanted, but I wanted to make sure I was reading it right, that I wasn't missing something, that it wasn't too good to be true. So I kept reading it again and again, and I was like, Let me make sure that's what it says. Let me make sure it's Hopkins. Um, and, you know, let me make sure we're not leaving next year. I think for him, he felt so good that he didn't have to quit his job right away. So I think both of us felt really happy.

NATALIE KOONS:

University of New England put on a wonderful celebration for all of us. They had champagne and oysters and had an incredible turnout. We had over 90 medical students and all of their families joined for the celebration. And then they had a countdown starting at 1158. And we all counted down and then opened our letters and celebrated and took pictures with our friends. And it was an incredible feeling.

And it was funny because they had also been live streaming the event. So I had family watching me on a screen and we knew exactly where the camera was located. So I could like kind of turn to the camera and wave to them. And so everybody, even the people who weren't able to to join me in Maine, were able to see the outcome. And my reaction.

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

My day was a little bit different than what I had planned on originally. I was originally just going to have a more low-key day and maybe do a hike with my boyfriend and just keep it kind of like just between the two of us. But I ended up changing my plans completely

like the day before. And I actually went to the school with my classmates. I really wanted to be there and I wanted to be there to support them as well and see where they matched and sharing the excitement with everyone. And it was such a fun day. The entire faculty was there for my school and we really just got to go up there, share our programs and just really be happy for each other.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

... and if, in retrospect, they'd have handled the process differently, knowing what they now know.

IMAN SOLIMAN:

I do feel that the process is just very anxiety inducing and it's pretty hard to find a way around that. I'm here on one end where I matched at my number one and I'm super happy and this is exactly what I wanted. But I also have a lot of friends who didn't match at their number one, who ended up separated from their significant other. So I don't know. I think in hindsight it's a little bit normal to be nervous. I think having expectations that are too high can also be a little bit damaging. If you go in with a realistic view of what this process is like to begin with, then you can really only be excited and not disappointed.

NATALIE KOONS:

Honestly, I think the whole journey of applying for residency, going through the interview process, going through the ranking process, is all very individual and knowing you know how the outcome has turned out for me, I wouldn't change anything. I think everything that I did gave me a new perspective on, you know, what kind of programs I was looking for, what kind of people that I would feel supported with. And I always tell people to their third years who are asking me, you know, applying for away rotations right now, where should they apply and where should they be looking? And I and I say to everyone, you know, going into your fourth year, the time that third years are right now, you have a kind of a vision of what you think your life is going to look like and where you're going to go to residency. But all of that can change within five minutes of talking to somebody from a different program and kind of, you know, keeping an open mind throughout the residency application process because you never know what program is going to be the right fit for you.

Honestly, I never thought I'd have a chance to go to Stanford. It's been a dream program for me since the beginning. And I had reached out to one of the research directors there back when I was a second year, and I still have that email. And she had

responded back, you know, talk to me, you know, sooner to application process. And I was only a baby second year at the time. And now looking back on that email and being like, Wow, this is where I'm going is pretty incredible. But I knew after my interview that I just had a good gut feeling about it and continued to listen to my my gut throughout the the rest of the interview process and then also the ranking process. So, and then I actually had an opportunity to go out there in February because I have never been to the Palo Alto area. Um, and I didn't want to rank a program, you know, very high if I had never gone to the city. And so my mom and I traveled out there for a few days just to see the area. And I knew during that time that this was the place for me.

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

I don't think that there would have been anything that I had changed. I think I really tried my best and I did the rotations. I got the strong letters of recommendation. And I think you just kind of have to go with it. And I don't think there was any regrets in anything that I had done. I don't think. Maybe just taking more time for myself is probably something that I would do.

CAROLYN MENSCHING

They had some great advice for medical students...

IMAN SOLIMAN:

Follow that gut feeling. Going into the season, I felt like, okay, there's this one program and it's definitely going to be my number one. And then slowly I felt that changing and I think it was hard for me to kind of get rid of that feeling that but thought this was going to be my number one. But my gut was telling me something else. And in the end, I kind of went with that gut feel. And Hopkins is the program that was giving me that gut feel. And I'm really glad that I took that chance and I'm very excited. So I would say, especially in this Zoom era, if you get a certain vibe, if you have that gut feeling, definitely stick to it. But at the same time, I think it's really important to recognize that, you know, if I had matched up my two, three, four, five, six, there is no one program for anybody. And it's really going to be about what you bring to the program, and you can be happy anywhere that you choose to be. So if you thought you were going to get your one and you get your five, that doesn't mean you can't be happy and that doesn't mean you can't be an amazing and successful anesthesiologist. So I think it's just really important to kind of go in with that view that, yeah, you have a number one, but there are lots of programs that you could be happy at.

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

I would try to find hobbies this year to really kind of keep you distracted. And that's something I wish I would have looked more into and like, Hey, I really want to like, learn how to do piano, like teach myself and just focus on that during their fourth year to kind of keep your mind off of the anxiety and the stress of fourth year. Because I feel like there is besides like the application process, there was a lot more free time compared to the first three years of medical school and really taking that time for yourself and finding new interests and new hobbies that you can really delve into before you don't have a lot of time in residency.

NATALIE KOONS:

Go with the flow is hard as that is. If I told myself that six months ago, I'd probably be like, You're crazy. But this whole process is a learning experience. I learned a lot about myself throughout this learning experience as well as what I want in a program and who's going to support me in every single aspect of my career. And listening to your gut is truly the way to go. I kept asking people, you know, how do you rank? How do you rank programs? I love all these programs. I love all these people that I've interacted with. And everyone kept telling me, it's a gut feeling. It's a gut feeling. And I'm like, I don't know, Like, I haven't gotten that yet. But, um, there was definitely specific places, one Stanford being one of them, where I had that gut feeling. And it's just, it's hard to explain, but, you know, when you know.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

Finally, now that their future was clearer, we asked what they're most excited *and* nervous about.

NATALIE KOONS:

My friends and I were talking about this, how we kind of had a vision of 20 different lives and 20 different areas of where we were going to live and 20 different places. And now it's, you know, just focused on this one track, this one trajectory that you can see really clearly. For me, I think one of the most exciting things is my partner and I of almost nine years. We finally get to live in the same place. And we've been long distance all throughout medical school. So this is a huge step in our lives and moving together, hopefully starting a family together in the future and kind of creating our life together. So this is a huge, exciting step. But not only that, moving to California. So I'm from New York and went to medical school on the East Coast in Maine. So, you know, traveling all across the country and kind of living in a new place, um, is something that I'm super

excited about. And just meeting all of my co-residents and faculty and um, starting this next career move.

IMAN SOLIMAN:

I'm really excited to go apartment shopping. I've been itching to move, but I've been putting it off because I knew residency was coming up and I think now that I know where I'll be, I think, you know, as soon as Monday comes, we're going to hit the ground running on that apartment shopping. I'm excited for some guilt free time. I think a lot of the time in medical school, even when you're off, even when you're technically, you know, not at the hospital, you constantly feel that you always have to be productive, be contributing something. And I still hope to spend a lot of my time like that now, but I'm definitely looking forward to spending time with, you know, loved ones traveling, just taking a break and making some time for myself while I get in the right headspace to go into residency in a healthy and positive way.

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

I'm most excited about just seeing all my co-residents. There is actually one who I rotated with at the Mayo Clinic and so I'm excited to go back there and train with him and just meet everyone that you'll be with for the next four years and kind of be like a family, like a close-knit community. And so that's really what I'm excited for, especially I feel like the culture at Mayo was very inclusive and they really cared about you and it was really like a culture of community and looking out for each other. So that's something that I'm really excited for. Something I'm a little bit nervous for is, I guess the big move. That's definitely up there. And the winters, too. I'm a little bit a little bit nervous about that. And that's going to go down. But I know it'll be fine.

CAROLYN MENSCHING:

We enjoyed celebrating Match Day with our three guests: Natalie Koons, Iman Soliman, and Savannah Whitfield.

NATALIE KOONS:

Thank you so much.

SAVANNAH WHITFIELD:

Thank you.

IMAN SOLIMAN:

Thank you for putting this together. I'm looking forward to hearing it all.

CAROLYN MENSCHING

We hope our listeners did too. Thanks for joining us, be sure to come back next month for more Residents in a Room, the podcast for residents, by residents.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

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