



Match Week and the Second Chance (SOAP) Program: An Information Guide for IMGs

Introduction. Every year, medical school graduates around the world diligently put together their applications for US-based residency programs with dedication, care, and high expectations. Most rely on the matching service of the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) and its ability to line up the priorities of residency program directors with the priorities of the applicants themselves. On average, each year, more than 90% of US medical school graduates and around 50% of International Medical School Graduates (IMGs) are placed in residency programs as part of this matching placement service. Those percentages have been increasing in recent years as the various parties involved get more attuned and as demand increases.

Some residents and programs, however, do not get matched or are only partially matched by the service in the initial phase, and thus, they have the option of turning to what is known as the Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program known as SOAP. This guide helps IMGs prepare for the events surrounding Match Week and the SOAP process and offers step-by-step information on what to expect. While everyone wants to be matched instantly on the first day, it is wise to at least consider what might be needed if presented with the SOAP option.

Background on SOAP. Established in 1952 at the request of medical students who were seeking a fair and equitable way to match up their preferences with those of the residency programs, the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) is a private, non-profit organization whose board members include medical students, resident physicians, residency program directors, and representatives from medical education organizations. The mission of NRMP is “to match healthcare professionals to graduate medical education and advanced training programs through a process that is fair, efficient, transparent, and reliable.” To carry out its mission, NRMP has established powerful computerized [mathematical algorithms](#) that enable the matching process to take place. It manages the overall communication between and among programs and residency applicants through a system it calls R3: Registration, Ranking, and Results.

Up until a few years ago, the unmatched parties engaged in what was known as the “Match Scramble” that took place after the initial matching phase had concluded. Now, that set of post-matching activities has been replaced with a more orderly process known as the Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program.

The Match Process Explained. On the NRMP website is a [6-minute video](#) for IMGs on what to expect in the Match Process that leads up to Match Week. It explains how the match process works and who is eligible to participate. The NRMP also provides a [checklist and some tips](#) that include important information about deadlines and action steps to be taken. The following diagram is a summary of that information that emphasizes key dates and reminders.

As the diagram indicates, the registration deadline for the Match Program is January 31st. The registration fee is \$85. Applicants may register after that deadline but will incur a \$50 late fee. All participants in the NRMP Match Program must be registered no later than the Rank Order List Certification Deadline of March 3rd.

Note: Once registered, be sure to enter your NRMP ID into your MyERAS Personal Information.

Note for IMGs: All test scores must be certified by ECFMG and available in ERAS by no later than one week prior to the start of Match Week (by March 8, 2021).



Starting February 1st, applicants and program directors will put together their Rank Order Lists as per the match instructions. Applicants are encouraged not to wait until the final deadline date of March 3rd to submit their rankings. No changes can be made after that date.

The Match Week Timeline. The following is an exclusive compilation of important details in the series of events that will take place the week of March 15-19, 2021.

Key Moments in the 2021 Match Week's SOAP Process

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 am (EST): Match Results released along with the NRMP® List of Unfulfilled Programs • 11am-12pm: Time for candidates to research the list and identify priorities • 12pm: Time for candidates to start submitting up to 45 SOAP applications in ERAS. • 3pm: ERAS begins releasing submitted applications to programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All day: programs develop priority lists and may contact candidates for interviews. Candidates should be accessible by email, phone, ERAS account, and NRMP Account. • (As per the Match Participation Agreement, candidates may not contact programs either directly or through another person.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12pm-2pm: SOAP Offer Round 1 begins. Programs make offers via the NRMP R3 system. Candidates can accept or deny. Any unanswered offers expire at the end of each round. • 3pm-5pm: SOAP Offer Round 2 begins. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9am-11am: SOAP Offer Round 3 begins. • 12pm-2pm: (New) SOAP Offer Round 4 that was added in July 2020 begins. This is the final round. • 3pm: SOAP concludes. NRMP releases final List of Unfulfilled Programs into the R3 system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Match Day! • Final match results are made available on NRMP's R3 system at 12 pm ET • Match Week closing ceremonies are held in some US medical schools.

PREPARING FOR MATCH WEEK: WHAT STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

STEP 1: Watch the webinar on the NRMP website to determine your eligibility and know what to expect.

The NRMP has put together a [one-hour webinar](#) especially for IMGs that is complete with colorful graphics and detailed information on the Post-Match Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program. IMGs are encouraged to watch and be prepared to take notes during this presentation.

STEP 2: Make sure you are properly registered and have paid the necessary fees.

The annual Match process through NRMP requires a separate registration process from that of ERAS and other programs. Applicants can register for the match at nrmp.org, pay the registration fee (\$85), and obtain an NRMP ID number. The standard deadline for the Match is January 31, 2021 at 12:00 pm ET. After that, anyone wanting to register will incur a late registration fee. All applicants must be registered prior to the Rank Order List Certification deadline on March 3rd. If you are already registered for the Match service, you do not need to pay an additional fee for participating in SOAP.

STEP 3: Make sure your NRMP and ECFMG information are up-to-date – and learn about any deadlines.

Take another look at all your information, keeping in mind that these organizations all maintain separate systems, so you need to maintain accurate and current information across all platforms. For example, if you entered a school email address in your initial application(s), make sure to update your current email address and any other personal contact information – in both ERAS and NRMP R3 -- so that you can be reached during Match Week. Other places on the AAMC and ECFMG websites may need to be checked as well.

Regarding your test score certification, and the special circumstances surrounding this year's Step 1 CS, check with [ECFMG](#) for more details.

As Match Week approaches, NRMP encourages applicants to follow them on Facebook and Twitter to receive updates and the latest information.

STEP 4: Submit any paperwork with regard to enrolling in SOAP, including the Match Participation Agreement and certified USMLE and other test scores.

For example, IMGs must be sure that their USMLE and other required test scores are certified by ECFMG no later than one week prior to the Match. In general, it is a good idea to go back and review the original documents you signed back when you set up your NRMP account to refamiliarize yourself with the requirements and expectations.

STEP 5: Review and make any necessary updates to your MyERAS profile.

Take another look at all your documents uploaded into the portal. For example, if you need to update any facts in your Personal Statement or you want to add a new Letter of Recommendation to reflect new accomplishments and experiences, you may do so before the Rank Ordered List Certification deadline.

STEP 6: Organize your schedule and make a commitment to be available that week

The match process really is an entire week and involves exact timeframes and “windows” in which certain actions must be taken. Thus, it is important for anyone taking part in the SOAP process to adhere closely to the requirements and observe the strict deadlines that come in quick succession over the course of 4-5 days.

STEP 7: Organize your notes and IMGPrep Program Lists©

Prior to the start of Match Week, it might be helpful to review your IMGPrep Program Lists that include detailed information for IMGs about residency programs. If you have not already accessed this service, you can contact the IMGPrep office to obtain more information.

DURING MATCH WEEK: WHAT YOU CAN DO

On Day 1, keep open three sites on your computer screen:

- **NRMP R3:** This is where you will be notified (at 11:00 am ET) about the initial match phase and learn whether you are matched, partially matched, or unmatched. You will also receive the Unfulfilled Programs List. If you are not matched in the initial phase, you can refer to the list to begin selecting programs.
- **MyERAS portal:** This is where you will be submitting up to 45 applications to programs on the Unfulfilled Programs List. ERAS will begin releasing those applications to program directors as soon as 3:00 pm ET on Day 1 of Match Week.
- **IMGPrep Program Lists©.** During your selection process (roughly between 12:00 pm ET and 2:00 pm ET), you will find it useful to refer to your [IMGPrep Program Lists](#) to help you in selecting up to 45 options from among the programs on the Unfulfilled Programs List. Having the extra screen open and available can help you save time while researching your options during this part of the process.

In addition to these three screens, you may also want to check the social media sites for these same organizations to keep apprised of any updates throughout the day.

When selecting programs, NRMP encourages you to submit your true preferences, not just where you think you will get in. But part of your selection process may include verifying the program’s readiness to accept IMGs. That’s one of the ways the IMGPrep Program Lists can help.

On Day 2, make sure to stay accessible via your email, NRMP R3 and ERAS. These are the potential places where programs will contact you for interviews prior to making offers on Days 3

and 4 of the process. Remember, you are not allowed to initiate contact or ask anyone else to do so; the offers must come from the programs.

On Days 3 and 4, be ready to respond quickly. There will be four two-hour time blocks (two on Wednesday and two on Thursday) during which you may be receiving offers from programs. Applicants can expect to receive multiple offers during any of the four rounds. Your options for each offer will be to Accept or Deny. According to the Match Participation Agreement that you were required to sign, any offers and acceptances are binding and must be honored.

On Day 5, be ready to celebrate! The final match results will be posted in the NRMP R3 website by noon (12:00 pm ET) on Friday. Any unfulfilled program slots will also be included in the released information.

Other Resources: *(Some of these websites may still refer to deadlines for the 2020 Match)*

- ECFMG’s SOAP Information for IMGs: <https://www.ecfmg.org/echo/nrmp-soap.html>
- ERAS 2021 Residency Timeline for IMGs: <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-residency/article/eras-timeline-img-residency/>
- IMGPrep Article [“Mark Your Calendars: What to Expect for Match Week 2021 and SOAP”](#)

