



*Perspective/Opinion*

## **Match Day: Happily, ever after? Not always**

*By Dan Bor*

*Sometimes knowing where you matched before everyone else is not as blissful as you had envisioned ...*

I went into Match Day on March 17th, 2023, knowing exactly what was written in my envelope. I did not apply to only one program or hack the NRMP. While most medical students would be envious of knowing their match ahead of time, I don't think they would envy me. I was couples matching, and sadly, my partner was notified earlier in the week that she did not match. When this happens, the NRMP allows the matched partner to see the city of their program. At the very least, this can help to find a program that is geographically close to the matched partner. Since the city I matched in had only one program, I knew exactly where I was going.

The week my partner had to endure to find a position was miserable and soul crushing. We woke up with expectations and dreams of a perfect match, and the possibility of going through our training in lockstep. All of this was shattered that morning while brushing our teeth. The first of many times I broke down in tears this week was when she, through sadness, still gifted me a set of "stormproof matches" she had purchased ahead of time. We found our way to school where we formulated a plan and then spent Tuesday through Thursday waiting for any phone call while being powerless to our hyper-analyzing of every interview and every part of her application to even fathom where things may have gone wrong. While it was meant to raise our spirits, every "we have no idea how this could've happened" was difficult to swallow. But she prevailed and secured a position for this upcoming year. We had proven ourselves to be "stormproof" as we weathered what felt like the longest few days of our lives.

Entering match day felt surreal. I was soaking up the energy of those around me – nervousness and excitement, as this day was the culmination of all our classmates' hard work. I realized somehow the regular gossip and chatter of medical school had spared us. People looked at my lack of excitement and frown with confusion and disbelief. Once the ceremony started, it was interesting to hear all the speakers say how this would be "one of the best days of you and your families' lives." They mentioned how there's immense joy when you match at your number one program. Going to pick up my envelope, I made a few silly jokes about "wondering what was in my envelope" that were met mostly with confused glares, but the people who knew let out a laugh. Then, as we opened our envelopes, I couldn't help but look at everyone else's reaction. I, of course, checked my envelope to make sure no one changed their mind in the past 99 hours. They had not.

Before all the hugs and joy, I saw many reactions. I saw confusion, hurt, betrayal, and sadness at what was in those envelopes. I also saw some of my classmates' perfectly constructed futures splinter as well. On top of that, I saw genuine elation from those who had everything work out as they had hoped. Personally, I felt a deep sadness. Very few people in that room will ever feel the suffocating squeeze of what it means to SOAP. It was hard to find excitement for others when the algorithm that granted many of my classmates' happiness took mine away. After walking away from the ceremony, I felt a deep void within me. I did not get to have the textbook match celebration many dream of; I didn't even get a surprise that day. But I also felt a deep appreciation, first to my partner who found a way to keep fighting with a smile on her face when things were not going her way, and to the community of friends and loved ones who supported us this week. I had never felt a stronger connection to a "village" than after this week, when countless people in the MCW community brought food, supplies, and supportive messages.

While Match Day is happy for some, it can be bland or disappointing for many others. The day might not turn out how we envisioned it the first time we learned of this magical celebration, and that's okay. We need to allow ourselves to be disappointed that our expectations did not meet our reality and not feel compelled to "fake it" immediately. It's okay if this day is not the happiest of your life or even in the top 1,000. Match Day can serve as a reminder that while an algorithm determines our position, it does not determine what we do with it. Where you match also does not change your worth or your character. Whether we're happy or sad, we're taking the next step in taking care of patients.

Match Day can act as a further reminder of the honor and privilege it is to be a healer for others, and that is ultimately why we all undertook this journey.

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