



Perspective / Opinion

The Ritual of Match Day

By Marc Drake, MD

Dr. Drake, an MCW-Milwaukee alumnus and current PGY-2 resident, went through the Match in March 2020, just as the pandemic was beginning. He discusses Match Day as one of the rituals of medical school ...



As the first and only physician in my family, the start of medical school was both an exciting and terrifying time. I moved to Milwaukee knowing not a soul, and quickly bonded with my classmates, many of whom were in the same boat as me. As orientation week came to a close, I learned about an aspect of medical school that I hadn't expected at all: the rituals.

Just as we would eventually become familiar with the entirely new language of medical jargon, we would also become familiar with a set of traditions and rituals unique to physician life. I called to tell my family that they should attend something called the "White Coat Ceremony," which would serve as my inauguration into my new profession. As the months progressed, I learned of other major events that would demarcate my time in medical school, for example, Step 1 and the start of clerkships.

However, no tradition sparked my curiosity more than "Match Day." Senior medical students spoke about the day with a mix of fear and awe, though everyone agreed that it had the potential to be one of the happiest days of medical school, the perfect bookend to the White Coat Ceremony. I went through interviews with that same mix of anxiety and anticipation as my fellow fourth year medical students, eager to open that envelope with my peers excitedly exclaiming where I would spend the next several years of my training.

However, like many others, COVID-19 upended my plans. Instead of being in a packed auditoriums with my friends and family, I ate tiramisu with my wife and held the first of many Zoom meetings with my friends to exchange stories of where we would be heading off to. It

was nothing at all what I expected when I started my medical career, but it was still a special day that I will look back on fondly for the rest of my life.

This pandemic has undoubtedly altered the face of our healthcare system and, though my Match Day was a sharp deviation from tradition, it taught me important lessons that I continue to use as a resident: Be flexible and roll with the many surprises that the healthcare system will undoubtedly deal you. Lean on those around you, particularly during the difficult times. And, most importantly, take time to celebrate, even in small ways.

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