



Perspective/Opinion

The Couples Match Take 3

By Alexandra Kershner and Andrew Sepiol, both M3 students at the Medical College of Wisconsin- Central Wisconsin.

Ever wonder what it would be like to couples' match? What is the good, the bad, and the ugly of the process? Here is our perspective on our experience, and some advice that hopefully can be helpful to you! As a couple are trying to match into OBGYN (Alex) and Internal medicine with the possibility of doing fellowship (Andrew).

How did you and your partner come to the decision to couples' match?

For us, it seemed to be an easy decision because the most important thing to us as a couple was to match together, no matter where it was. However, it was still riddled with anxiety and daily conversations to try to calm the nerves.

"How would it work out for us? Are we both strong candidates? What would OBGYN being more competitive do to our match process? Would it give us the desired outcome of being at a strong program together? Would we even still be close together?"

Even though the couples match created more anxiety and complexity to the match process, we decided the couples' match was the best choice for us. Most of all, it would give us the best chance to stay together during residency and provide a way to make our relationship a priority alongside our careers in medicine.

What has your experience been with the couples' match process? Have there been any unforeseen benefits or drawbacks?

The couples match takes an already 10/10 stressful process and turns it up to 11 because it over doubles the amount of variables to consider, especially if one partner has a competitive specialty in mind (like Alex). Despite the stress, our couples match experience overall has been, as we would like to say, lucky. We have been lucky in the fact that we both received a good number of interviews individually and many of those interviews overlapped, so we didn't have to worry about possibly ranking a lot of programs that weren't close together.

The largest benefit of the couples' match was being able to draw on the strengths of each other's applications to gain each other interviews at a few programs if one of us hadn't heard from a program yet.

Alex:

One drawback is trying to interview while keeping in mind that you are looking for two people instead of just yourself. Of course, you should always vet the program for yourself, but I found myself always thinking about how we could function and be happy together at the program during my interview.

Another drawback is when I interviewed at a place I absolutely loved, but my partner didn't receive an interview anywhere in the area, so that program got taken off the board. Of course, that is a personal decision that occurred between my partner and I and probably looks different between each couples' match. It all comes down to values and what you are looking for.

Andrew:

I also wonder if applying as couple hindered us from gaining interviews at a few places that we might have gotten as an individual applicant.

What do you wish you had known prior to undergoing the couples match? And what advice would you give others who are considering the process in the future?

Andrew:

There isn't much that I didn't know about the couple match before, simply because I wouldn't make such a big decision without carefully researching and thinking through the cost/benefits of it. I knew we wanted to be together and that we had to make it happen, so we did. My advice to future couples is to carefully consider all the variables around each partner's strengths/weaknesses and how this may impact the match. I think it also helps to work with your medical school admissions committee or interviewing future candidates in general because it gives insight into how you're being evaluated. Knowledge about how interviewers think is invaluable because often they are going into the interview with an agenda with things they are looking for on a checklist. If you manage to meet those marks, great; if not, you might be able to advocate for yourself by wording your responses in such a way that you can turn certain weaknesses into strengths. My example is that I feel on our campus we must overcommit ourselves to doing things to be competitive. This is both a weakness because I have trouble with some obligations because of this; but also, a strength due to developing great time management and knowing how to prioritize my life in such a way that I can get things done.

Alex:

Being that interviews are virtual; I wish I could have mentally prepared myself for how many interviews I was going to be attending. It felt like so many and being on zoom for an entire day and then getting back on zoom for the resident social later that night for 5 days/week was exhausting. But I felt like I had to do that many interviews to help myself and my partner feel

comfortable in our couples' match, because the reality is that you don't know how it is going to turn out. When you are adding in another person, it takes it to the next level of complexity.

I have two pieces of advice:

1. Be prepared to have hard conversations and make sure you give each other plenty of space to talk about aspects of programs that you loved or disliked because if you have those honest conversations, it will make your rank list the best for both of you.
2. This advice I had gotten from a resident is what I based my whole couples match experience on, and it was extremely helpful. First, create your rank list separately without the influence of one another. Then, once you have your individual rank list, then you can come together and discuss what compromises you are willing to make or the distances you are willing to travel. I think this piece of advice really allowed us as a couple to not overshadow the other's preferences and really create a rank list that considered both of us and our goals.

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