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What should applicants be working on at this stage in the application process? (April-June) CAS application (personal statement, consolidating CV, finalizing research manuscripts if applicable, approaching letter writers, etc). It will be worth getting them reviewed by your seniors/ partner/ mentor (I am happy to review them as well, especially for IMGs)!

How did you find your mentors? Can you give us practical tips on successfully getting to know mentors better? I have a different journey than most applicants- I am an international medical graduate and moved to the US in pursuit of research training after finishing my residency in India. During my stay here, I decided to pursue an academic career here. Regarding finding mentors: I had a keen interest in retina, especially retinal imaging, for which I reached out to the Harvard Retinal Imaging Lab via email, personal statement, CV, and letters of reference. Having mentors actively involved in student/resident education, teaching and research is always of great advantage in terms of support, advocacy, and learning. Shadowing them in clinics and ORs would be the best way to know them better as well as to display your clinical knowledge/ skills and bedside manner. Doing a research project with them or their research fellows gives you an extra advantage to display your strengths of teamwork, inter-personal communication skills, commitment, and dedication to the field of Ophthalmology. Maintaining good relations with staff and lab members is very important. These experiences, besides improving the application, also helps you get a stronger LOR as programs are looking for these qualities in their prospective residents.

How did you approach the personal statement? Does it have to be about interest in Ophthalmology? This year, the format for personal statement was very different. For the 500-word biographical sketch, I made sure my statement reflects my core values. I started with some story in childhood and how I got interested in medicine and Ophthalmology. But my major chunk was on why I wanted to move to the US and my passion for research. (Make sure your CV corroborates your statement in every way). Yes, I would definitely recommend mentioning on why you want to pursue the specialty when applying to its residency.

Any pearls on how to succeed during Ophthalmology clerkships? Be yourself. Work hard. I would make sure to reach on/before time and stay till the end. And help staff/ residents/ attendings in little ways. Once, I also imaged a patient in clinic to help the techs. But, I would also advise to stay

mindful to not be an interference, especially in a busy clinic. I would ask "I noticed so and so ... Is there any way I can help you with?" Presenting at grand rounds is another great opportunity to showcase your skills and it was a great experience for me. If possible, shadowing on weekend/evening during calls also helps. I do not think anyone expects you to know anything in Ophthalmology so please do not stress about that.

How many Ophthalmology recommendation letters did you obtain? Can you share the timeline of when you asked, how often you reminded letter writers, and when the letter writers submitted them to SF match? For me, all three letters were in Ophthalmology. I was told that the general rule is to ask them at least one month before the deadline. In-person is better. I sent a summary of key points with my CV, and a draft to those who asked. I would remind them one week before the deadline if they haven't uploaded. The most important factor is to ask people who can provide you with a strong personalized letter, which often comes with long collaboration.

What do you feel like were the biggest strengths of your application? What do you feel like were your biggest weaknesses? (How were you also able to overcome these weaknesses?) I think my biggest strengths on application were a combination of all: - good scores, LORs, research, honors, and my CV corroborating the personal statement. These were the things often brought up in interviews. I think being an international medical graduate could be considered a weakness. I think interviews helped me a lot and changed things for me. Good interview can help you overcome the leadership's concerns/ implicit bias. I also think the key is to believe in yourself and your why, even when no one does. Quite a *cliché* but true.

What were you the most afraid of at the start of the application journey? I had heard that applications are often filtered out using specific criteria so I was worried if I will get a decent number of interviews. But in the end, I got the same as the mean number of interviews per matched individuals in 2022. And it worked out well for me.

Did you send letters of interests prior to receiving interviews or after the first wave of interviews came out? Do you believe this helped? Yes, I did for a few. It rarely helped, but I do not think it harmed me either!

Did you have mentors reach out to programs on your behalf to obtain more interviews? -

Any tips for virtual interviewing? Maintaining a good eye contact is important. Smile. Helps you display your joy to be interview at their program. I would

also suggest having a good professional background. Maintaining a good audio/ video/ internet setup is key. And have a backup for all. YoungMD connect has good tips on their website.

Did you send a letter of interest? Yes, I did send a 'You are my #1 program' email.

Looking back, what are three things throughout the application process that you believe helped you succeed? My passion and hard work, my support system and being completely honest in my application and interviews.

Would you be interested in offering advice to applicants this upcoming cycle in a one-on-one format? Yes, I would love to help in any way I can! Happy to pass it forward.