

ENDODONTIC RESIDENCY

Notes from the Endodontic Residency Series - Updated February 2025

This information is a result of the annual ADEA Residency Series, co-sponsored with the Office of Career and Professional Development and the UCSF ADEA chapter. Residents shared their thoughts about endodontics on a panel and gave advice to dental students about the application process and residency experience.

EXPLORING ENDODONTICS

Q: What is endodontics (endo)?

A: Panelists defined endo as treating and restoring healthy, natural function to infected or potentially infected teeth that are periodontally sound or can be made so. A central mechanical objective is the biological protection of tissue surrounding an infected tooth. The philosophy of endo is to stop thinking like a restorative dentist; endodontists prefer to work near the pulp, building a foundation for restorative dentistry. According to panelists, “endo is 90% mental and 50% skill.” It is also the #1 specialty in dentistry for gross income.

Q: What do panelists like about endodontics?

A: Residents on the panel enjoyed providing immediate relief of pain to their patients and assisting them in retaining their natural dentition. Also, endo is at the forefront of new technologies such as microscopy and cone beam CT scanning. In addition, endodontists are able to work closely with general practitioners as part of restorative teams; endo “puts the foundation where the house will be built.” It is also a satisfying field in terms of gaining expertise and solving challenging problems. The profession is in high demand so it is relatively easy to find a job, and there are no lab fees so overhead is low. One resident stated, “if you don’t like endo right away, keep an open mind; pre-clinical lab takes the good stuff out of endo.”

Q: What is a typical day like for an endodontist in private practice?

A: Panelists reported that a practicing endodontist’s day is broken up into multiple 2-hour sessions. In each session, two patients are seen concurrently (e.g. one for a root canal and one for a consultation). Between 8AM and 6:30PM there may be 4 of these 2-hour shifts, plus emergency shifts and time for charting and patient check-ups. It is important in private practice to build good relations with general dentists, from whom most referrals come.

Q: What are some endodontics-related activities available at UCSF?

A: Panelists encouraged students to observe procedures in the 3rd floor specialty clinic and get involved in the American Association (AAE) of Endodontics, academic research, and 4th year students can participate in endo clerkships.

Q: Is it useful to do an externship?

A: Yes! If an applicant is interested in a particular school, he or she can do a brief externship there for a week at a time. Panelists recommend doing externships in June, so that the applicant is fresh in the minds of his or her admissions committee at that school.

Q: Is it useful to join a professional organization?

A: Yes! Panelists recommend joining the AAE. Membership is \$92/year for students and looks great on a CV. Reading through their publications helps you converse intelligently. “You will be amazed at the connections you can make” by attending the AAE annual meeting—endo is a small field.

Q: How should students get involved with endodontic research at UCSF?

A: Contact the program director, currently Dr. Mike Sabeti. It is recommended that the student has an idea for a project prior to their meeting with Dr. Sabeti.

UNDERSTANDING ENDODONTICS RESIDENCIES

Q: What types of endodontics programs are there?

A: According to panelists, endo programs may be primarily didactic or primarily clinical. Extremely didactic programs, such as Baylor and U. Washington, may require ~120 cases to graduate; extremely clinical programs, such as U. Florida, may require 450. UCLA requires 250 cases and 10-15 surgeries. UCSF's program requires ~200 cases and 20 surgeries, and the program is only 2 years.

Q: What is a typical day like for an endodontics resident at UCSF?

A: Panelists reported that residents see 2–5 patients per day. 70%–80% of time is clinical with the remainder didactic (e.g. lectures, literature reviews, and case presentations), on-call (e.g. emergency and trauma treatments), consults, teaching, and operating room time. It is a busy schedule with 9–10 hour days and significant required reading outside of clinic and didactic time—endo residents must commit to staying on the forefront of their field. However, when on call, residents are rarely required to come into the clinic at night; they can generally call in prescriptions (e.g. benzodiazepines, antibiotics, and pain medications) and make appointments to see patients the following day. Residents say every case is different, with particular challenges related to the patient, the diagnosis, and the referring dentist, so it is never boring.

Q: What is the most difficult aspect of being an endodontics resident?

A: Panelists shared that work as a resident is less efficient than it might be in the “real world.” Residents may not have assistants (some have to mix their own cement), and generally work harder and get less downtime or vacation time than they would in private practice.

Q: What coursework should a dental student take to prepare for endodontics residency?

A: Since UCSF is Pass/No Pass, panelists advised students to work for as many honors as possible in their classes, especially clinical courses.

Q: What kind of clinical experience is required for an endodontics residency?

A: Many endo programs require strong clinical backgrounds in their residents. In fact, some will only consider candidates with private practice or GPR experience. If students are applying straight out of school, panelists recommended calling each program to learn their policies before applying. One resident panelist completed a GPR residency at Pennsylvania prior to his endo residency at UCSF. If students do apply straight from school, show strong clinical experience beyond the typical 3rd and 4th year requirements by participating in additional endo cases, especially retreats, 2nd molars, and other difficult cases. As of now, the general rules are that applicants should have 2-3 years of experience as a general dentist before applying.

Q: Do endodontics programs value research experience?

A: The answer to this question depends on the school. According to one panelist, when programs read applications, they can tell whether you put significant effort into research, or “were just tacked onto the end of a project.” One resident noted, “research is important, but is not everything; if you do research, it should be your own project.”

Q: How can applicants get information about specific endodontics programs?

A: Panelists shared several pieces of advice. Information online is very limited. The ASDA book is useful but

some information is incorrect. Applicants should call program directors and visit individual programs directly, and are generally encouraged to talk to as many practicing endodontists as possible—academic faculty as well as private practitioners. It is particularly useful to talk to faculty trained at various institutions, particularly those that lecture only once a month, because they see the most patients in their non-academic time.

Q: How much does residency cost?

A: Panelists stated that UCSF pays, but that without a stipend, residency costs the same as UCSF Dental School.

Q: Are boards required? What about GREs?

A: Boards are not required and applicants can take the GRE after they get into the program. Some schools made the Advanced Dental Admission Test a requirement for applying to endodontic programs.

Q: Do you have to take call?

A: Yes, but it is very rare that pagers go off for emergencies.

PREPARING THE RESIDENCY APPLICATION

Q: What is the timeline of endodontics residency applications?

A: Applicants must apply to each program individually, since their deadlines are all different; unlike other specialty application programs, endo programs are on rolling admissions. There is no match program in endo. If an applicant is accepted, he or she usually has 24 hours to accept the position—so some applicants refuse to answer their phones until they hear from their preferred program(s). One resident recalls making a decision between waiting for the school he really wanted and ensuring himself a spot in any endo program.

Q: In what school year should I apply?

A: To start the residency program right after completion of the DDS program, applications should be submitted in the spring term of D3 year. Please keep in mind that some Endo residency programs do not consider new DDS graduates, so do your research about each school you are interested in before applying. It is highly recommended that DDS graduates practice dentistry for several years and/or obtain a GPR or AEGD prior to applying to an endo residency program.

Q: What constitutes a competitive application for endodontics residency?

A: Panelists shared that a strong application includes good letters of recommendation, (formerly, a score >90 on the National Board Dental Examination Part I), a class rank in the top 25%, a strong clinical background in either private practice or general practice, strong interest in/commitment to endo, and a good fit with the program and other residents. Some schools with master’s degree programs also require applicants to take the GRE, while other schools may require the ADAT. One student added, “make them notice you, whether it’s for great board scores or great letters of recommendations—take every opportunity to stand out in a good way.”

Q: What should a UCSF student consider in applying for endodontics residency?

A: According to panelists, some programs (e.g. U. Washington) are skeptical of UCSF’s Pass/No Pass system; be sure to express confidence in your abilities. Letters of recommendation and interviews are particularly important for UCSF students.

Q: How can you obtain excellent letters of recommendation?

A: Panelists shared several pieces of advice. Ask faculty for recommendations early. Applicants need letters

from the school's Dean, a clinical faculty member, an endo specialist, and a mentor. Talk to faculty regarding your interest in endo. One panelist recommended networking: "Set up appointments with the Dean in your 3rd year for letters and help; don't bug them, but let them know you are interested." Be wise in choosing your recommenders. Avoid generic letters and try to get letters from faculty who are well-recognized in the field. Be aware that different endo programs have different emphases; some are more clinical, leading to a certificate, while others are more academic, leading to a certificate and master's degree. Gear your recommendation letters toward the type of program to which you are applying.

Q: Should applicants apply concurrently to GPR programs, in case they are not accepted in their desired endodontics programs?

A: This path is not necessarily recommended. Endo programs make their decisions relatively early (September or October), so applicants still have time to apply to GPR programs.

Q: What is a typical interview day for endodontics residency like?

A: About 12-15 candidates meet for breakfast in the morning; each candidate then spends about 50 minutes in each of 4-5 interviews with breaks in between. Applicants are advised to talk to as many residents as possible during their breaks. Panelists advised to follow interviewers' lead during interviews: "If they are serious, stay serious; if they joke around, consider joking back." One panelist recommended, "if they ask you what you will do if you don't get in this year, tell them you will apply again. Let them know you plan to do everything you can to strengthen your application, and ask if they have any tips."

Q: What other application advice would you give?

A: Panelists advised students to research programs which have accepted UCSF graduates in the past. According to a panelist, students may have a better chance of admission to these places.

Q: Does it matter how many endo cases I have?

A: It depends on the program. An applicant with a more diverse and interesting case portfolio is viewed positively.