

This information is a result of the annual ADEA Residency Series, co-sponsored with the Office of Career and Professional Development and UCSF ADEA chapter. Faculty, residents and D4s shared their thoughts about the qualities of an outstanding candidate in their specialty, and gave advice to D1s, D2, & D3s 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; preclinical 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. They can also participate in endo literature reviews and case presentations (Wednesday afternoons at UCSF), continuing education courses, and academic research. 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 \$20/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.

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 125 cases to graduate; extremely clinical programs, such as U. Florida, may require 450. UCLA requires 250 cases and 10-15 surgeries. U. Pennsylvania’s program requires many surgeries. UCSF’s program takes 3 years (most programs are 2 years) and is primarily clinical, requiring 270 cases and 24 surgeries; everyone is required to complete master’s degrees.

Endodontics Residency

Notes From the ADEA Residency Series

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 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 must deal with authority, may not have assistants (some have to mix their own cement), and generally work harder and get less down- time 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. Honors are available in 3rd year courses including Foundations of General Dentistry (PC 131- 134 with Mark Dellinges), Clinical Periodontology (PCC 138 with Peter Loomer), and Comprehensive Care (PCC 139 with Steve Eakle and/or Susan Lee).

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 now, 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 sketchy, since 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 UCSF pays, but without a stipend, residency costs the same as UCSF Dental School.

Q: Are boards required? GREs?

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

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: 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 good fit with the program and other residents. Some schools with master's degree programs also require applicants to take the GRE, 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. The endo residency program at UCSF does not accept graduating seniors; applicants should have approximately 2 years of practice experience.

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 and Dr Goodis (endo specialist) 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. 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 panelist, students may have a better chance of admission to these places.