

Periodontics Residency

Notes From the ADEA Residency Series

This information is a result of the annual ADEA Roads to 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.

Q: What is periodontics?

A: Perio is the treatment of periodontal disease, from slight chronic periodontitis (SCP) to saving teeth, performing osseous grafts and dental implants, and tissue manipulation and engineering. Panelists recommended the web site perio.org for more information (numbers reported are not always exact).

Q: What is life like for a periodontics resident at UCSF?

A: Panelists report that the first 6 months at UCSF are primarily didactic. By the spring quarter, residents are in clinic 18 hours per week, with an additional 10 hours per week of class. Residents attend clinical seminars (such as implant seminars) on a weekly or monthly basis. Each month 2 residents are on call and must carry pagers. There may be oral hygiene clinical responsibilities, but 2nd and 3rd year residents concentrate on surgery. Traditionally, residents were required to perform 100 implants in order to graduate; current residents average 80–100 implants. Perio residents at UCSF complete master's degrees.

Q: What do you like about periodontics?

A: Residents enjoy working on the cutting edge of technology, and being closely associated with medical procedures. UCSF's program is particularly current, having one of only two fiberoptic periodontal endoscopes at US programs (the other is in San Antonio). Perio also constitutes a wide field of research, since periodontal disease is still largely a mystery. Residents also appreciate the relationships they have with their patients.

Q: What are panelist's future plans after residency?

A: Most panelists are interested in part-time academic careers and feel they are "always going to be teaching."

Q: When should applicants apply to periodontics residency?

A: Current residents recommend applying early (around June 1st or July 1st) because admissions are on a rolling basis. They also recommend asking for letters of recommendation as early as possible—about 2 months in advance.

Q: What constitutes a strong application?

A: According to panelists, at schools where the GRE is required, scores are important, but overall interest and extracurricular activities matter most. Research experience is good to have, but "not that necessary," depending on the residency program. Prospective applicants are advised to participate in perio club and periodic literature reviews (held at UCSF on Fridays at noon). UCSF perio program requires the GRE be taken as a Master's degree is obtained during the residency.

Q: What letters of recommendation are needed, and how can applicants obtain excellent ones?

A: Panelists stated an applicant should supply recommendations from his or her school's perio department, research advisor, and clinical faculty. When requesting a recommendation, provide your personal statement, CV and transcript to the faculty member.

Q: What additional application advice would panelists give?

A: Panelists advise doing an externship at the school(s) to which you want to apply, and observing in clinic as much as possible.

Q: How did panelists choose between programs?

A: The panelists looked at how much time was spent in clinic and didactics. In addition, they considered research focus, IV sedation, the size of the program and the program cost (most are under \$10,000).

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Q: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the UCSF Periodontics Program?

A: According to panelists, the advantages of UCSF's program are the location, small size, research focus, IV sedation, the program is not as structured (some may view this as a disadvantage). In addition, residents work closely with other specialties at UCSF, the hours are good, and there is the opportunity to rotate through the VA where patient finances aren't a factor. It is also the only program in Northern California. The disadvantages are the politics, the school does not have a director, the school staff is unionized so they don't get paid for helping out more.

Q: What is the application like?

A: Requirements are different for every school. Panelists reported that the application process can be tedious because some of the applications are not online, so students have to call each program and ask them to send a hard copy by mail. Some programs are PASS. Applying to non-PASS schools saves money. According to panelists, applicants can take the GRE after they apply, before Part II of boards and before they are accepted. Most programs want applicants to come straight from dental school. Panelists mentioned that the interviews at East Coast schools were very relaxed.