

Specialty Spotlight: Urology

by Jennifer Bellask

Life experience, whether it is a former life as a technician or a family member's illness, generally influences the specialty area future physicians choose when it comes time for a residency. My exposure and interest in urology came by way of my previous career as a medical journalist working for the *Journal of Andrology*. The 2 years that I spent working in urology and andrology piqued my interest in a possible career choice as I now enter my second year of medical school.

Urology, also known as genitourinary surgery, is a surgical subspecialty that tackles a wide spectrum of disease involving the male and female urinary tracts and the male reproductive system. The field of urology has long been a desirable specialty, attracting some of the most competitive medical students, according to the Society of Women in Urology.

For Dr Cathy K. Naughton, assistant professor of Urology at the Washington University School of Medicine, she credits her interest in urology to three factors: exposure to the field, process of elimination, and role models. "It takes one person to spark your interest in something," Naughton said. "Mentorship is key."

Relating to the people in the field is just one of the many reasons to pursue a career in urology. The broad range of surgeries performed, the lifestyle, research and technology, specialization, and flexibility within urology are some other factors that make the field attractive. People going into surgical fields generally mention qualities like enjoying working with their hands and valuing teamwork. Having a strong interest in surgery is one of the most important reasons to enter into urology.

For medical students interested in urology, Dr Peter Schlegel, chairman of the Department of Urology at the Weill Medical College of Cornell University offers this piece of advice: "Learn as much about the field from residents, other students who have applied for residency positions, and local faculty members."

Participation in a urology rotation is also important to gain exposure to the field. According to Schlegel, many

students take more than 1 month of urology subinternship, but he also notes that it is not necessary for interview or residency preparation.

If all this exposure to the field has confirmed the decision to pursue urology, some other areas of the potential application should be considered. According to both Naughton and Schlegel, a well-rounded applicant who expresses interest in urology through clinical, research, or apprentice-based experience is critical.

The importance of research is dependent on the program. The more academic programs will be interested in research but do not necessarily require that the research be in the field of urology. For Osteopathic medical students interested in urology, the American College of Osteopathic Surgeons requires that a resident with a surgical specialty develop a research project and follow through with it, ending with a paper suitable for publication, according to Dr Al DePolo, Jr, program director for the Department of Urology at the Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Although many factors are taken into consideration when deciding between applicants for a coveted residency spot, DePolo cites some qualities that go beyond classroom performance, rotations, and research. "I think the best things a prospective candidate can bring to any residency are: a strong desire to learn, a good work ethic, honesty, a sense of fair play, and the willingness to be part of a team," Depolo said.

According to statistics released by the National Residency Match Program for 2005, 108 nonmilitary accredited urology residency programs in the United States listed 232 positions, with all vacancies being matched. Medical student applicants, totaling 347, submitted preference lists netting 115 unmatched applicants, giving a 78% match rate.

Although there are many reasons to choose urology and many people who have decided on urology as their career of choice, not everyone follows this path. Trainees might *not* select this specialty because surgery is not for everyone and because surgical training can oftentimes be brutal. In addition, future Urologists need to be comfortable with the topic material and with the reality that urology is a male-dominated field. Despite this, it is important to remember, as Dr Schlegel points out, that women with an

interest in urology are often viewed favorably because they have been “underrepresented in the field in the past.”

With all this information to digest, I know I will follow a wise piece of advice cited by DePolo: “Do not become set in your choice too early. Take the time and the effort

to experience other areas of medicine and surgical subspecialties. A decision about a career area can wait until the third year.” And you never know, after all is said and done and I have followed the advice of all, urology might just be in my future.