

Guide to FPMRS Fellowship application

The Fellowship application process seems to incite anxiety in most applicants. In this guide we present recommendations to assist you through this process and to help optimize your effort to become the strongest applicant possible. Applying for fellowship requires planning and commitment. Time passes quickly during residency, so it is imperative to avoid procrastination. Ideally your preparation would start at the beginning of residency or better yet, prior to residency. Here are some specific suggestions:

- **Apply for a residency program with an FPMRS fellowship:**

It is not expected that you know for certain that you will apply for fellowship by the 4th year of medical school, but if you are considering applying for fellowship as a medical student it is advisable to go to a residency program with an FPMRS fellowship. In cross-sectional studies fellowship directors considered attending a top ranked obstetrics and gynecology residency program followed by clinical research experience and a high-quality medical school education to be the most important pre-match education factors. A top ranked residency program has been defined as historically strong programs with excellent clinical FPMRS volume and well-respected FPMRS faculty. Attending a residency program with a FPMRS fellowship will provide mentorship from fellows who recently matched in a fellowship program and from attending mentors whose career you can emulate and from whom to obtain letters of recommendation. Pragmatically, in this relatively close-knit field, a favorable letter of recommendation from a well-connected mentor will go a long way to help secure a fellowship position.

- **Identify a mentor early in your residency:**

At the beginning of residency you should identify a faculty mentor and cultivate this relationship. Ideally this would be an Urogynecologist or Urologist specializing in female urology. If your institution does not have an appropriate mentor available, you may consider forging a relationship with a mentor at a nearby institution in your area. Although it is possible to establish such a relationship, it is much easier to identify a mentor in your own residency program; this highlights why it is so important to select a residency with FPMRS faculty. Once you have identified a mentor, make an appointment with them to cultivate a relationship and get career guidance. During this meeting you should share your career aspirations and ask them about their career development. This relationship will allow you to obtain a strong letter of support when you apply for fellowship but more importantly will be fruitful throughout your career as you will likely see them at least annually at the AUGS national meeting. A letter of recommendation from a subspecialist in the field was rated as essential by 54% of Female Pelvic Medicine and Reconstructive Surgery Fellowship directors in one study. Productive mentorship can help you secure a competitive fellowship position.



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- **Participate in a research project relevant to FPMRS:**

Get involved in a research project early in residency, ideally as an intern. Research projects take time to complete, by starting early you will have opportunities to present your research at national meetings and publish your results prior to applying for fellowship. Typically the deadline for AUGS abstract submissions is in early April each year. Oral presentations on your research at a national meeting will strengthen your fellowship application. All accredited FPMRS fellowship programs require you to perform research to develop and defend a thesis; performing research as a resident is a great way to form the foundation for this process and will help distinguish you from other applicants. The most feasible projects to complete as a resident are case reports, case series or retrospective studies, although other study types are possible. Try to choose a research project that is relevant to FPMRS.

- **Attend the annual meeting of AUGS or SGS:**

It is advisable to attend American Urogynecologic Society (AUGS) annual meeting in the fall at the beginning of your third (OB/GYN) or fourth year (Urology) of residency. This is a great way to get broader exposure to the specialty and provides networking opportunities with attendings at most of the fellowship programs. Eighty-four percent of FPMRS fellowship directors felt that attending a national meeting was helpful for networking with fellowship applicants. Due to the timing of the match for FPMRS you may also consider attending the Society of Gynecologic Surgeons (SGS) annual meeting in April as interviews usually start around the beginning of May. If you are interested in attending the AUGS annual meeting, you should apply for an AUGS resident scholar travel grant (<http://www.aug.s.org/p/cm/ld/fid=126>) during your second year of residency. This provides funding for a select number of third year residents to attend the annual meeting.

- **Participate in an externship:**

Depending on your circumstances, you may consider participating in an externship approximately 6 months to a year prior to applying for fellowship. Many fellowships have established programs for visiting residents. Participating in an externship provides an opportunity for further exposure to FPMRS and allows you to obtain a letter of recommendation from well-connected faculty. If you chose to go on an externship, plan on it being an extended interview.

- **Get a head start on your personal statement:**

Start on your personal statement roughly 8 months before you plan to submit it. Your personal statement does matter; a poorly written statement with questionable content, grammatical or spelling errors could hamper your chances of matching. Give yourself ample time to personalize your statement and make it interesting. For example, describing time spent on international



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service will likely have a greater impact and duration of effect than simply stating you like to help people. Don't just list what you want from a fellowship program: describe the traits and talents you will contribute to the program and explain what you eventually hope to offer to the specialty in general. It is important that you have several people read and edit your personal statement evaluating both content and grammar; thus, be courteous and provide them with enough time (2-3 weeks) to make edits.

- **Schedule an appointment to request a letter of recommendation:**

Schedule an appointment(s) to request a letter(s) of recommendation 6 months (around September or October) prior to the application deadline. During this meeting you should solicit input on which programs to apply to and share the experiences that have helped shape your career goals. The more personalized and familiar your letter writer is with you the stronger your letter will be; make certain to specifically ask if your letter writer will write a strong letter of support. Then follow-up 2 months later (around the beginning of December) with a reminder request including your personal statement and an updated CV. Letters of recommendation are often needed from your program director, department chair and another faculty member familiar with you.

- **Accredited Programs:**

Here is a list of accredited programs (<http://www.augs.org/p/cm/ld/fid=79>). We recommend that you research and review these programs. Consider where graduates of the program work, and look at the mentorship and who would be mentoring you at each program.

- **Applying to FPMRS through ERAS:**

Apply to FPMRS through ERAS and the match is handled through NRMP. The NRMP publishes statistics for all fellowship programs, the information specific to FPMRS can be found in this document, the most recent data from 2012 is available at the following link:
<http://www.nrmp.org/data/resultsanddatasm2012.pdf>

- **The interview process:**

Once an interview has been offered, the fellowship director has confidence that the candidate is academically and technically qualified for the program. After this, the importance shifts from medical ability to interpersonal and social skills. Even the most technically competent and medically knowledgeable candidates will have a difficult time matching if it is perceived that they lack the ability to integrate into a new program. The interview process is expensive, it is typically recommended that candidates interview at approximately ten programs. Although the cost is variable you should roughly budget \$4500 to \$9500; the vast majority of this money is spent on travel as most applicants will travel to 10 or more interviews. A listing of this year's FPMRS match process deadlines can be found here (<http://www.augs.org/p/cm/ld/fid=165>)

Additional information:

1. Gibson KS et al. Factors used by program directors to select obstetrics and gynecology fellows. *Obstet Gynecol.* 2012;119(1):119-24
2. Muffly TM et al. Factors used by female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery fellowship directors to select their fellows. *Int Urogynecol J.* 2010;21(3):349-52.
3. Muffly TM et al. Attributes of successful and unsuccessful female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery fellowship applicants. *Female Pelvic Med Reconstr Surg.* 2010;16(1):65-9

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