

# Steven L. Berk, M.D.

## What is Match Day?

00:06

So this Friday 178 medical students, and medical students all over the country will be opening up an envelope that will tell them where their additional training after medical school graduation will be, what residency program they'll go to, and what specialty of medicine they'll study.

## What has their medical education looked like up to this point?

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Well, of course, all medical students have studied at least eight years of a very difficult, very focused education program, worked very hard in the basic sciences and in college, and four more years in medical school of basic sciences and clinical training. And now, they have made a decision on what further training they want to do, what specialty they want to go into. This class in particular, has had a difficult course, not only the usual, very, very long hours of training, but having to deal with the COVID pandemic over the last two years as well. And we had to change the curriculum somewhat. And we had to make sure that on the one hand, we were giving them optimal training, but even more important that we were protecting them and keeping them safe on the wards.

## Why is this day so important to these students?

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These are students who sacrificed a great deal in college, studied intently for their basic sciences competed to get into medical school. In our school, we take 180 students out of 5000 applicants. Came to medical school, worried about passing anatomy and biochemistry. Having to pass the difficult USMLE exams. Again, worrying about their own safety and the safety of their family over the past two years. And so all of that culminates into this day on Friday, when they open up an envelope and find out where their training will continue. They have an idea of how well they did in their various interviews. But they really don't know what that envelope is going to tell them not only about what city in the country that they may wind up in, but some have actually applied to more than one discipline. So they may find out, they'll find out for sure what field of medicine they're going into.

## How do you think medical students were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

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There was something about the COVID pandemic that actually increased the enthusiasm of medical students and really made them proud to be part of this profession.

## What do you remember about your match day?

03:37

Well, the basic match principle, back when I graduated was the same, you would interview in many different places, then you would rank the programs that you liked the most. The programs would then rank all of the applicants. And the same computer algorithm would be used to optimize the match for both parties for the students and for the program directors. For me, first of all, I was on an Indian reservation at the time of the match, and even headed the lay in communication, of finding out where I

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matched. I didn't find out till the following day. We didn't have iPhones back we had telephones, but we didn't have iPhones back then. And my first choice was Mass General Hospital. It was considered the best hospital maybe in the country. It's where all the good Boston students wanted to go. I didn't match at Mass General. I matched at Boston City Hospital, which was my second choice. And as I tell the students within months, I realized that Boston City Hospital was actually the place meant for me, it had a more diverse patient population. It was a real opportunity for collegiality among interns who had a high level of responsibility. And I realized that sometimes you wind up where you're most needed. And I tell the medical students that if they're disappointed that they didn't get their first choice, maybe wherever they wound up is where they were meant to be.

### What would you like people to know about this particular class?

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So it's this class that went through the third and fourth year, doing their clinical rotations at the time of COVID. And so that's difficult enough to be introduced to the wards, after the first two years, but they were introduced to the clinics and wards during a pandemic, everyone wearing masks concern for their own health and safety. And yet, by all our measurements, this class is outstanding. Their knowledge base has not been affected in any negative way by the pandemic. And their enthusiasm for medicine, if anything is greater, fueled by the pandemic, and the pride that they have in the profession of medicine.

### What makes TTUHSC School of Medicine graduates so special?

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Well, we were particularly proud this year, because this was the first year that the AAMC did a survey, where they asked program directors all over the country to rate students from specific medical schools, students that were in their residency program. And 38% of our students were rated as exceeding expectations from program directors, and only 2% were below expectations. So that was an outstanding report that showed us that we're really training medical students in the best possible way. So there will be some of our medical students that will go all over the country to some of the very prestigious schools, and hospitals. Many will stay here actually, about 20% of the students will probably stay here in one of our 28 residency programs. But even those that go away to do their residency, wherever in the Mayo Clinic or Mass General Hospital, there's a really good chance that they'll come back to practice in Texas, and about 65% of our graduates are practicing in the State of Texas, which is one of the highest in the country, on rating of what percentage of your students are practicing in their home state. So yes, we think that's very important for the state of Texas, and we want our students to train wherever they think is best for them. But we know that a lot of them are going to come back and practice in Texas, and a lot of them are going to practice in Lubbock and West Texas.

### Why is the mission of TTUHSC so important to this area?

08:29

When we look at what specialties our students choose, Family Medicine is usually the most popular, then internal medicine, pediatrics, but a good number of our students probably 50% This year will have chosen a primary care field. And that's what the state of Texas really needs. But of all the specialties the state of Texas needs students to go into family medicine, because if you look at towns of 25,000 or less, the only doctors in those small towns are family medicine physicians. So we're very proud that we

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developed the first Family Medicine Accelerated Track. There's now about 10 other schools that have a track like that, where our students can finish medical school after three years and go into one of our family medicine residency programs. And that has increased the number of students going into family medicine dramatically from about 10% of our student body to more like 18 or 20%.

What does it mean to you to be experiencing another match day in your 16th year as the School of Medicine Dean?

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Well, the great thing for me is that if you're a dean for just three years, which is the average, you never get to see class graduate, but I've seen 12 classes graduate from the white coat ceremony to graduation itself. And I get to know an awful lot of those students and see them progress from worrying about whether or not they'll pass anatomy to really being ready to be excellent, well trained physicians. So that's a great thing for me white coat ceremony and graduation and match day, you know, will mean a lot as you follow students from one year to another and see their tremendous development and growth. And again, we had an interesting dilemma, we had differences of opinion with our students. In fact, some of our students were frustrated with us that they didn't get to do as much as they would like to do, including many of them who would have liked to have been in the ICU taking care of COVID patients. We made the decision that their safety was more important than optimal education. And so when I explained that to the students, I tell them hundreds of health care workers died of COVID. We had seven staff members who died of COVID we had a faculty member who died of COVID but we had no students or residents who died or even got severely ill. So we know we made the right decision in in making sure they were safe. And I think they'll learn how to take care of COVID patients, you know, better down the road as residents if the pandemic continues, but we were we're really sure we did the right thing and making their safety a priority.