

# The Complexity of Medical Training: Helping Loved Ones Understand

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The structure of medical training, from medical school to residency and beyond, is complicated. While we as medical students work with residents, fellows, and attendings every day, our loved ones who don't have as much experience with the medical field may have never even heard of these terms, much less understand their roles in a clinical environment. It's hard to explain medical school, residency, the matching process, etc., to people who haven't lived through it—simply put, it's complicated, as many of us have told our family and friends. Because of this, I often find myself struggling to answer questions about the structure of medical training and my future plans. Despite the challenges, it's worth the time and effort to help our loved ones understand the complex process we're going through.

Medical education can be isolating. Many trainees find themselves growing apart from family and friends during medical school and residency; this is due, in large part, to the tremendous demands on their time. Most people hold the perception that medical school is hard, but that doesn't mean they understand the true nature of its demands. Helping our loved ones gain a deeper comprehension of the realities of medical education and the associated time constraints may help them better understand why it's more difficult—or sometimes impossible—to attend family gatherings or social events with friends. Additionally, many loved ones take an interest in the process expressly because they want to learn how they can best support us. Taking the time to explain what you're going through can provide insight

into how they can help you, whether it's making sure you have an environment conducive to studying for exams or distracting you from the stress of Match Week.

To make such a complicated system more comprehensible to your loved ones, look no further than the skills you already use to explain diseases and physiological mechanisms to patients. Use terms they can understand and analogies that relate to their lives. Do they watch medical shows? Tell them you'll be like J.D. from *Scrubs* once you graduate medical school. Struggling to help your relative understand the matching process and why you don't just get to pick where you'll work for the next three to seven years? Tell them that it's a little more like the NFL draft than it is a normal job search. Use humor; send them Dr. Glaucomflecken's sketches about Match Day and the matching algorithm.

Beyond the tools that we use to make complicated concepts more accessible to patients, though, we can also help our loved ones understand by being honest about our experiences. Be vulnerable with the people you trust about your struggles and allow them to see how medical training impacts you.

Ultimately, while you may help your loved ones better understand medical training and its demands, it's important to be cognizant that your loved ones also have a lot of demands on their time. Remember that they need your support and to know that you care about them, too.