

4.3 THE UNMATCHED SCENARIO

A new addition to the CFMS Matchbook

Lead Editor: Peter Farag

Introduction

The number of unmatched students has unfortunately continued to increase over the years, reaching an alarming total of 222 in 2018. The sense of isolation from peers, uncertainty surrounding next steps, and financial expense have been reported by past unmatched students as major sources of stress. Accordingly, the Unmatched Canadian Medical Graduate Task Force has compiled the following strategies and supports to assist in developing a sound plan, promote mental wellbeing, and ease financial burden for students who find themselves in the unmatched scenario.

Note: The options outlined below are subject to offering by school of training. Please check with your Student Affairs Office to confirm feasibility.

Strategies

Applying in the Second Iteration

By Andy Ng & Peter Farag

Immediately after the Match results are released, unmatched students are required to make a few time-sensitive decisions. One of these is whether or not to apply in the CaRMS Second Iteration. To aid prospective applicants in making an informed decision, the following points have been highlighted:

- **The 2nd Iteration application window opens only a few days after release of 1st Iteration match results and closes in only 7-14 days.**
 - › As the window for application changes from year to year, please confirm the Applicant's Timeline at the [CaRMS website](#).
- Prospective applicants should review the list of unfilled residency positions and identify those positions that they are willing to train in.
 - › The list of unfilled positions is available on the CaRMS website and may be requested through the Student Affairs Office.
 - › There may be unfilled positions in the applicant's first choice or second choice specialties, however, the majority will be in Family Medicine (and many of these are only available to Francophones).
 - › A 'competitive' designation means that the position is also open to IMGs.
 - › A 'ROS' designation means that there is a post-residency requirement to work in that province's underserved communities for a set number of years.

- Prospective applicants should consider the greater competitiveness of the 2nd Iteration. In 2018, 54.6% matched in the 2nd Iteration vs. 93.0% in 1st. Reasons include:
 - › CV not geared towards specialty applied to.
 - › Competition with IMGs.
 - › Many Family Medicine positions inaccessible to Anglophones.
 - › Enthusiasm for specialty not relayed through Personal Statement or interview.
- Applicants are encouraged to reach out to their Student Affairs Office for additional support and advice in making a decision.
 - › Alternative options vary in offering by school of training.
 - › Participation in the 2nd Iteration is required by some schools to attain eligibility for alternative options.
- Should an unmatched student apply in the 2nd Iteration, consider that:
 - › The requirements for application (e.g. Personal Statement criteria) may change and should be checked through the CaRMS Program Descriptions.
 - › There is a fee for each application.
 - › Documents from the 1st Iteration are kept, though new documents can be uploaded.
 - Consider seeking out new or modified reference letters where possible, particularly if applying to a new discipline. Should your Student Affairs Office have a Letter of Reference toolkit, consider forwarding this to your referee
 - CVs used for the first iteration should be modified to emphasize areas that are relevant to the position being applied for.
 - Ask academic advisors or mentors (in the relevant specialty, if possible) to review your new CV and Statements.
 - › The 'My Information' sections cannot be edited once an application is submitted and one cannot remove/cancel an application once submitted.
 - › The opportunity cost of participating is that you may lose 1-3 weeks of time to plan alternative options for the coming year (e.g. additional electives).
- Should an unmatched student attain an interview, please consider that:
 - › Character, work ethic, enthusiasm, and understanding of the specialty are especially important to relay.
 - › Skype sessions may be requested. Ensure that your equipment is working, and that Skype is installed on an alternative device (e.g. cell phone) in case technical issue arises with computer.
 - › Opting for an in-person interview when it is optional may or may not be viewed in positive light.
- **Ranking a program is still binding!**

Applying in the Post-Match Process

By Salpy Kelian and Peter Farag

Within a couple days after the 2nd Iteration results are released, CaRMS may enable a Post-Match Process (PMP). Programs with positions that went unfilled after the 2nd Iteration have the option of participating but are not obligated to do so. Unlike the first two iterations, there are no application fees in the PMP nor is the matching algorithm used. Instead, CaRMS serves as a traditional job application site allowing students to submit applications to the programs of their choice with all steps past that being up to the programs. As a student you may upload new documents but cannot edit any of the “My Information” sections previously completed.

Schools may send offers for interview or acceptance at any time. Typically, they will place a two-day time limit on the offer before moving on to the next candidate. Applicants should expect short turn-around times between interview offers, interview dates, and offers for a position. **As there is no Rank Order List, offers are not binding and applicants may decline offers for acceptance.**

Helpful advice:

- Apply as soon as the post-match application window opens; interviews may be offered as early as three days into the process.
- Be ready for even same-day interviews.
- Given the fast turn-around times, Skype is commonly used. Ensure your equipment is working with a test call and have Skype installed on a backup device.
- You may be able to ask your Dean to advocate for you. Check with your Student Affairs Office regarding this option.
- Programs that did not grant you an interview in 2nd Iteration may for the PMP.
- Be honest about your motivations for applying and have well thought-out answers for why you felt you went unmatched in prior iterations.

Applying for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Medical Officer Training Program (MOTP)

By Peter Farag

An option that debuted in 2018 was the CAF-MOTP. This allowed unmatched students to enter Family Medicine residency programs throughout Canada on the condition that they fulfill 4 years of post-residency service with the CAF. Given the shortage of Family Physicians in the CAF, this option is likely to be offered again next year but is not guaranteed. Entrance in 2018 required the following dual-application but is subject to change.

- CAF Application:
 - › Open a job application to register with the CAF.
 - › Await instruction by email to contact nearest recruitment centre to complete a Canadian Forces Aptitude Test (CFAT) and Trait Self Descriptor (personality test). CFAT is at Grade 10 academic level evaluating verbal skills, problem-solving and spatial ability.
 - › You must then pass a medical exam to establish fitness for military service, and have a job interview.

- Family Medicine Program Application:
 - › A standard application, however, all documents are sent directly to the school (i.e. CaRMS is not involved at all).
 - › Applicants are interviewed by the program as well.
- Timeline:
 - › For 2018, application window opened on May 1, however, it will likely be earlier for 2019 should the program be offered again.

One may email HealthSvcsRecruiting-RecrutementSvcsdesante@forces.gc.ca or visit the [CFMS website](#) for more information.

Re-Applying the Following Year Through CaRMS

By Ana-Maria Iancu, Sandra Rao & Peter Farag

While going unmatched may present a difficult obstacle to your professional journey, it may also present an opportunity for much reflection and personal growth that strengthens your candidacy for the next cycle. Almost all schools offer a '5th year' with reduced tuition (check with your Student Affairs Office). Some schools such as Queen's or Western may have a more formalized 5th year while others provide you much flexibility. You may consider dedicating some time to additional electives and/or other interests outside of clinical practice. Such interests may include research, education, public health, etc. To ultimately relay the value of the unmatched experience at the next CaRMS interview, it's best to select a mix that builds on self-reflection and feedback.

- **Reflection and Feedback:**
 - › Re-evaluate each part of your application and clinical performance - was there any aspect that you doubted or felt some unease?
 - › Reach out to your preceptors and referees for their honest opinions. Explain the situation and consider obtaining detailed feedback on your performance according to the CanMEDS roles. They may reveal an area for improvement or suggestions for next steps. Reach out also to a trusted mentor or the academic counsellors.
 - › Consider speaking with colleagues for their honest opinions. It may be difficult for them to say or for you to hear but there may have been a negative impression given off, if even unintentionally.
 - › Speak to your Student Affairs Office to explore the options available for a '5th year' at your institution.
- **Electives:**
 - › Pursuing additional electives is especially valuable if you felt that your clinical performance may have been better or if you wish to explore another specialty.
 - › Should you wish to pursue more electives, it is often advisable to not graduate in order to maintain liability insurance and gain the school's assistance in securing placements (especially when the AFMC system is prohibitive).
 - › It is recommended that you not pursue the same elective at the same school unless you have a strong reason.
 - › Consider electives of longer duration. These may allow for a letter of reference

that attests to a more thorough assessment of your abilities. They may also be less disrupting to your schedule and less burdensome on travel expenses.

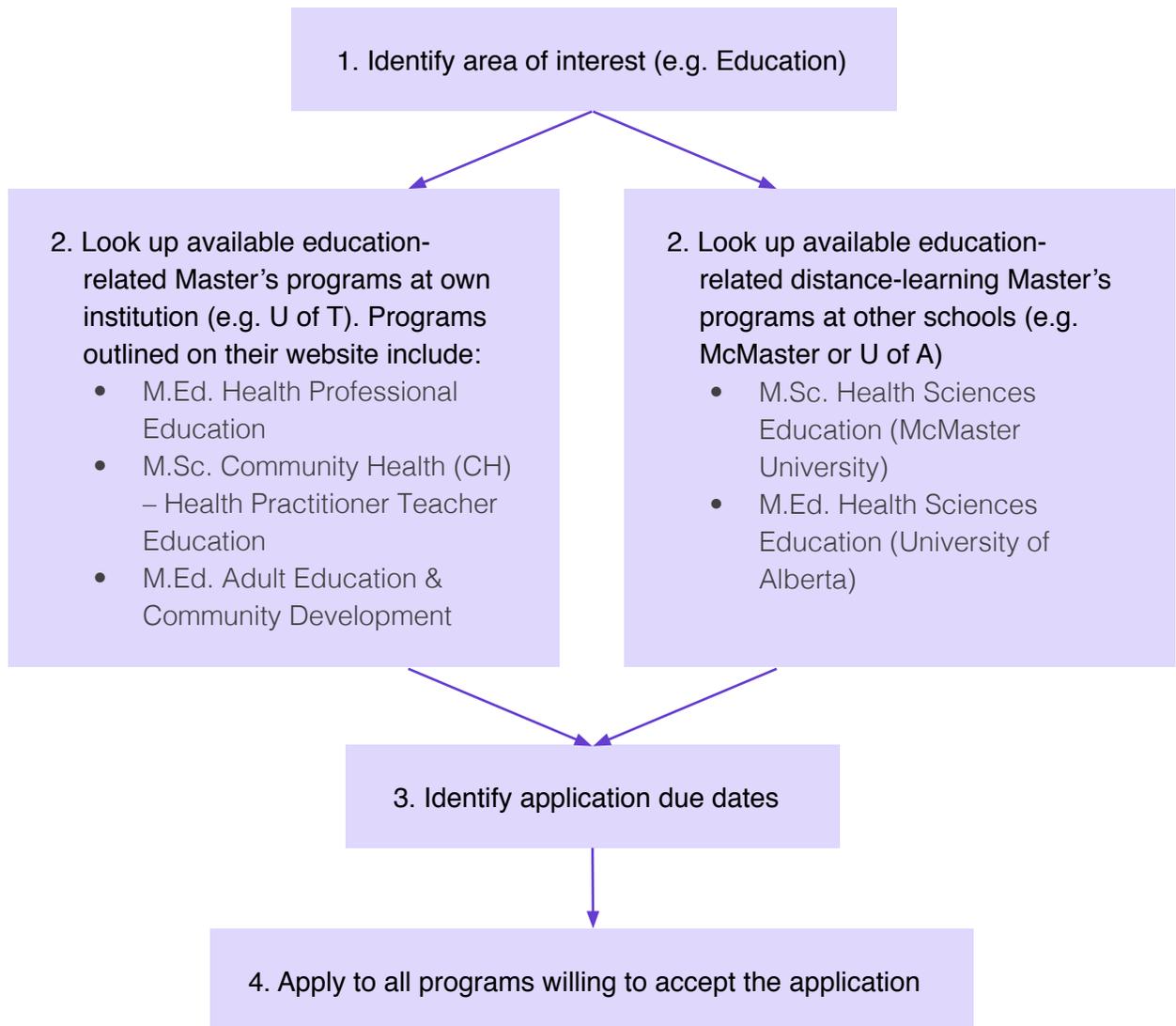
- › Should you have financial or time constraints, consider a greater proportion of electives at your home school. This may not be as detrimental as it may seem.
- › For Family Medicine applicants, be sure to have a good breadth of experiences and secure at least one or two rural electives.
- › During these electives, it is advised to not hide your experience of going unmatched as staff or residents may be more understanding and seek to advocate for you. The stigma of going unmatched cannot however be ruled out so do not be discouraged, but remain confident, if preceptors seem to be searching for a weakness.
- › Ensure that you obtain letters of reference from referees that are enthusiastic in supporting you, where possible. Review with your academic advisors how best to select referees.
- › If prepared, consider meeting the PD on elective and discussing your story; you may not get the room to do so thoroughly in your personal statement.

- **Scholarly Project:**

- › Often mixed with electives for the “5th year”.
- › Start thinking about potential projects as early as possible and identify a supervisor to help you. Prior preceptors may have ideas.
- › Research projects or fellowships are especially useful for re-application to competitive specialties such as Ophthalmology.
- › If research is not for you, consider alternatives projects such as those in medical education.
- › Ideally, you want some results to talk about during the interview process. Projects such as those in Quality Improvement may have a suitable turn-around time.

- **Master’s Focus:**

- › Many institutions offer course (or thesis) based graduate programs that can be completed within 1 year. The challenge is deciding what area of interest you’d like to pursue, and then researching available programs that are still accepting applications in the spring.
- › On the following page is an example of how you might find a Master’s program that caters to your interests:



****NOTE:** Although Match Day occurs later than some programs' application deadlines, you should contact the programs you are interested in applying to in case they are willing to provide an application extension. Some programs have done this in the past and applicants have successfully been admitted into graduate school.

Applying the Following Year to the United States

By Peter Farag

For unmatched students who are willing to cross the border, the United States presents a great opportunity for matching as there are far more residency positions. Keep in mind, however, that the process will require much time and effort, and even the US has a growing unmatched problem. It is recommended that prospective applicants consult their school's resources for detail on successfully matching to the US. Below are a few key points for consideration:

- Residency programs require completion of the USMLE.
 - › Virtually all require the results of Step 1 for file review. This can be taken in select

- Canadian cities. More competitive programs require higher scores.
 - › Step 2 is two parts and tests clinical knowledge (CK) as well as Clinical Skills (CS). Step 2 may not be required for the selection process but must nevertheless be completed before offers may be accepted. Select Canadian cities offer CK but CS is only offered in the US.
 - › Adequate preparation for Step 1 can take from 1 – 4 months. Recommended resources include your medical school notes, UWorld, and First Aid.
- There is significant variability in quality of residency programs. Forming a shortlist requires rigorous research.
- Applications are submitted through ERAS which begins accepting applications in June. A token for access must be requested through CaRMS.
 - › Some programs e.g. Plastic Surgery and Ophthalmology do not go through ERAS.
- Given that interviews are offered on a rolling basis (as early as October), it is advised to have everything ready for submission by the September window when submissions are first accepted.
- Applicants often take 4-8 weeks of electives in their preferred programs to improve their competitiveness. These are essentially auditions. They are also costly and may require malpractice insurance purchase from the home school (if not provided by the US hospital).
- The US match may or may not take place before the CaRMS.
- Prospective applicants may consult those who took this route before by contacting their Student Affairs Office. They may provide pearls such as which programs (or even States) tend not to take Canadian graduates.
- A resource some unmatched students who desire a surgical residency have found helpful is [US Surgeon](#), which is an agency that helps learners find residency vacancies in the US and assists with the VISA process. You can email director@ussurgeon.net with uCMG in the subject line to explore this process.

Exit PGME

By Peter Farag

This option involves graduating with an MD and seeking out an occupation that does not require residency. Of course, this rules out registration with the provincial licensing body and one may not independently provide the care for patients as a physician would. There are however companies (such as those in pharmaceutical industry) who may hire MDs as a consultant or liaison. This career path requires significant reflection on what type of career one may be happy with but is nevertheless an option that some have considered in the past.

Supports

Mentorship and Counselling

By Romesa Khaled and Peter Farag

An unmatched year can be difficult and confusing. Good mentorship and career counselling can provide great benefits both professionally and emotionally. Fortunately, there are multiple options available to support and guide unmatched students.

Firstly, The Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) has recently launched a confidential **unmatched CMG peer support network**, providing unmatched students with a peer mentor who can help them navigate the year ahead. These mentors, part of a growing database, are people who also have experience going unmatched. Every effort is made to align the candidate's unmatched experience, specialty of interest and province of interest with their mentor's. Interested students can reach out to vpeducation@cfms.org to confidentially request a mentor. For more information about the Peer Support Network, visit the [CFMS website](#).

Another great source of career counselling can be your school's **Student Affairs Office**. Often, the student affairs are the same people who have helped you with your 1st Iteration CaRMS application and have experience guiding unmatched students. The services offered by Student Affairs varies from school to school but may include:

- analysis of your application to look for reasons you may have gone unmatched
- review of personal essays and applications for 2nd Iteration CaRMS applications
- facilitation of feedback from program directors about your application, and practicing interview skills
- sharing information about research opportunities, graduate programs and other academic opportunities available to you
- connecting you with peer mentors from your own school, if available
- helping you decide what steps to take next (e.g. whether you wish to apply for second round or extend your clerkship)

Preceptors you have already worked with and ideally built a relationship with can also be ideal mentors. Remember that a good physician not only relates to patients, but also forms strong relationships with team members. Keeping in touch with preceptors who made a difference in your life not only nurtures your professional growth but also provides a resource to turn to in tough situations. Most preceptors will be more than happy to help you figure out what went wrong, give feedback about how you could improve, write strong reference letters for your subsequent applications and generally provide time-tested professional advice.

In that vein, it is also a good idea to at least try to reach out to the **program directors** of the programs and schools you applied to in order to get a clearer understanding of the reasons you have gone unmatched. Most will politely decline but it is always worth trying to find out if you can be given any useful information that you can work on for future applications. Program directors usually have the last word in creating their program's rank list and their thoughts on what they are looking for in a candidate can offer valuable insight. Your school's Student Affairs Office

may also be able to help you arrange a feedback session or meeting at least with the relevant program director of your home school.

Third-party career counselling firms such as MedApplications and MD Consultants are part of a growing movement to provide medical students with structured feedback and guidance on their path from medical school to postgraduate training. Their services include one-on-one sessions with residents and physician mentors, application reviews, and interview training, supports which are often applicable to unmatched candidates. Although they come with a cost ranging from \$150 to \$5000 depending on what is requested, such consultants can be a helpful resource for students who have graduated from their medical training and may not have the benefit of their school's career counselling services.

Physician Health Programs (PHP) are initiatives run by many provincial and territorial medical associations to offer education and supports to medical students, residents and physicians who have concerns about their mental health and well-being. It is a confidential, self-referral process that can be made by contacting a toll-free number at 1-800-851-6606. A clinical coordinator will then assess your concerns, identify your needs, offer information or advice as requested, connect you with a medical director as requested and finally, match you to community supports that best serve your needs. These resources include workshops promoting peer interactions, coping strategies, mental readiness, mindfulness and resilience. New sessions are also geared towards building confidence for optimal interview performance. To find your provincial PHP, please refer to the following [page on the CMA website](#).

Lastly, although most importantly, don't forget to turn to your **personal support system** – your friends and family! The unmatched year is a stressful time full of decisions to be made about your career. It's a process that requires a lot of mental and physical energy so don't forget to care for yourself outside of your identity as a physician. Turn to those who know and love you regardless of your career aspirations and who have been there for you through your medical school journey. Enjoy the time you have to spend it with people who can give you a refreshing outsider's perspective and a reassurance that there is more to life out there to be embraced. Your life is more than a career in medicine! In addition, your classmates in medical school may very well be the residents who interview you in subsequent CaRMS cycles and can provide a wealth of knowledge and insight about what to expect. They are also the people who understand your situation the best and will be your confidantes and advocates.

Finally, remember that there are many people who will help you along during your unmatched year. Don't forget to **keep them updated** about your life regardless of the outcome and especially once you do match. Give a little token of thanks for their help. A small gesture goes a long way to building meaningful, fulfilling professional and personal relationships.

Financial Supports

By Peter Farag and Kaylynn Purdy

The debt accumulated throughout medical school and the prospect of more expenses through future applications or an unpaid year is certainly concerning. Below are some resources to help alleviate the financial stress

1. **CFMS Discounts**
 - a. Flights and accommodations: for more information on Westjet discounts, refer to the [CFMS website](#) for more detail.
 - b. Small bursary: A value of \$150 offered by MD Financial following application to the second iteration and distributed through CFMS. Information provided in the application is kept confidential. Contact vpeducation@cfms.org for more information.
2. **School Bursary Programs:** Contact your Student Affairs office or Enrolment Services at your school to determine what bursary or financial aid is available. They may, for example, provide an application to reimburse travel expense for the 2nd Iteration or '5th year' electives.
3. **Banks**
 - a. Most medical student and resident line of credits do not go into repayment until two years after you graduate (RBC for example).
 - b. If you enroll in a 5th year program, be sure to submit your letter of enrolment to your bank, and the letter of continuing studies to the National Student Loan Centre.
 - c. Speak with an MD Advisor for free advice on how to budget and maximize your finances, more information at the [MD Financial website](#).

Other Questions

If I do not match in the first iteration, do I have to apply for the second iteration?

No. An unmatched student from the first iteration has the choice to opt out of the second iteration and thereby delay entry into postgraduate training for one year. They can then enter the match again in the first iteration of the following year.

What if I go unmatched following the second iteration of the Match?

Should a candidate remain unmatched following the second iteration, he or she can choose to take part in what is referred to by medical students as the "Scramble," or more formally, "post-match process". During this time, students apply to participating programs through CaRMS Online. These positions are publicly available on CaRMS' webpage.

Any candidate who goes unmatched should consult their undergraduate office to determine their options. This may involve discussing their career planning with a faculty advisor. Individual faculties may have a point-person who can help unmatched students strengthen their application for the following year. Options for the interim year can include an additional year of undergraduate medical education or a research fellowship before enrolling in the match the following year.

If the student chooses to apply to a program following the second iteration, students may need to contact individual schools to identify any available programs and apply directly through them. CaRMS facilitates document transfer through CaRMS Online for participating programs in the post-match process and posts a list of participating programs on their [website](#).