

Brief Research Report

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Writing Thank You Notes after Ophthalmology Residency Interviews?

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To determine the importance of writing thank you notes after ophthalmology residency interviews.

Design: Survey.

Participants: Ophthalmology residency faculty members.

Methods: A short multiple-choice survey using www.surveymonkey.com was distributed to Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology (AUPO) personnel who then distributed it to their respective faculty members that are involved in interviewing and ranking applicants. Six questions were asked to determine the importance of thank you notes after ophthalmology residency interviews along with the option to write comments.

Main outcome measures: The impact of thank you notes in the ranking of ophthalmology applicants following interviews.

Results: Seventy five total participants took the survey during the month of March 2016. Ninety point eight percent reported thank you notes never change their ranking of applicants; 4.6% responded yes, mostly in higher ranking; 4.6% responded yes, equally resulting in higher/lower ranking depending on the circumstances; and 0% chose yes, mostly resulting in lower ranking. When asked if they recommend applicants to write thank you notes: 46.7% chose no; 33.3% chose yes, only if personalized; 13.3% chose yes; and 6.7% chose yes, only if telling the program you are ranking them #1 (and mean it). Twenty six respondents wrote comments.

Conclusions: Based on the survey responses, largely thank you notes do not impact the ranking of ophthalmology applicants following interviews. However, many feel there is still a role for them.

KEY WORDS: Thank you notes; Ophthalmology residency interviews.

INTRODUCTION

The current gold standard is practicing evidence-based medicine. The road to residency is a rigorous one including 4 years of medical school, board exams, applying for residency, interviewing, and hopefully ending with matching at your desired program. What can and should one do after the interview?

Thank you notes after residency interviews remain to be recommended with only one survey done in 2010 asking 2 questions about thank you notes after ophthalmology residency interviews that revealed 14% of faculty members expect or desire them and only 3% are influenced by an applicant stating the program is their first choice.¹ Doing a quick Internet search, one can find numerous medical schools recommending thank you notes (UCSF, Drexel, Rutgers, and Iowa to name a few)²⁻⁵ along with residency websites (American Academy of Family Practitioners and Emergency Medicine Residents Association)^{6,7} and sites geared towards medical students.⁸

METHODS

A 6 question multiple-choice survey was created using www.surveymonkey.com. The study was granted exempt status by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of UT Health San Antonio. The survey was distributed to Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology (AUPO) personnel who then distributed it to their respective faculty members that interview and rank applicants. The survey included the following questions: the location of their residency program; their amount of time after training; do they enjoy receiving thank you notes; do thank you notes change their ranking of applicants; do they recommend applicants write thank you notes; and, if so, in what format. They were also allowed to write comments (See Supplementary Data).

RESULTS

Seventy five total people took the survey during the month of March 2016. Their location breakdown was the following: 35% Midwest, 35% Northeast, 9.5% West, 9.5% Southwest, 9.5% Southeast, and 1% anonymous. Forty point three percent are

faculty members for greater than 10 years, 29.2% faculty members less than 5 years, 19.4% residency directors, 8.33% faculty members for 5-10 years, and 2.8% chairmen. Twenty eight percent responded that they are indifferent to receiving thank you notes, 25.3% always enjoy receiving them, 25.3% enjoy them only if personalized, and 21% do not enjoy receiving them. Ninety point eight percent reported thank you notes never change their ranking of applicants (Figure 1); 4.6% responded yes, mostly in higher ranking; 4.6% responded yes, equally resulting in higher/lower ranking depending on the circumstances; and 0% chose yes, mostly resulting in lower ranking. When asked if they recommend applicants to write thank you notes: 46.7% chose no; 33.3% chose yes, only if personalized; 13.3% chose yes; and 6.7% chose yes, only if telling the program you are ranking them #1 (and mean it). Thirty seven percent do not have a preference between emailing thank you note *versus* hand-written, 21.9% prefer hand-written letters, 4.11% prefer email, and 37% responded non-applicable because do not recommend thank you notes. Twenty six respondents wrote comments at the end of the survey (Figure 2).

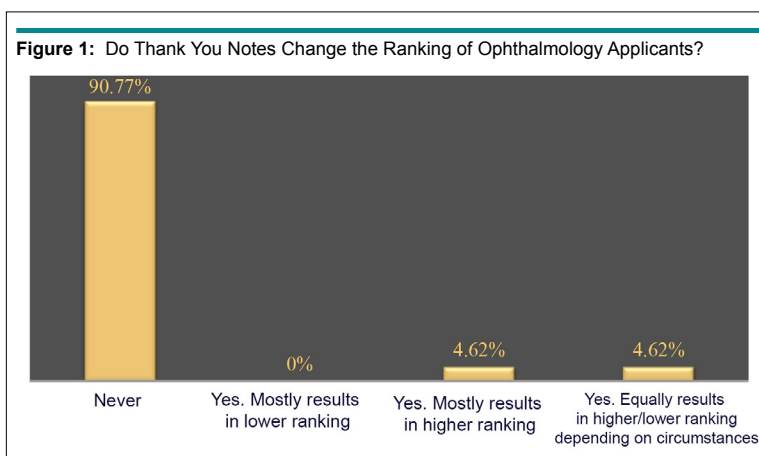


Figure 2A and 2B: Comments Provided by Survey Responders.

We decide on candidate rankings the same day as the interviews, so thank-you notes really have no bearing in a candidate's ranking	Hand written if they feel compelled to send one. Email is too impersonal.	I view personalized written thank-you notes as tangible expression of gratitude, a quality I find important in mature adults	In the great majority of cases, thank you notes are not read.
For me, the notes would not change my evaluation of the applicant, but I feel it does at least validate how I feel about them.	The other plus to receiving a personal note is that it indicates that the applicant has some enculturation in the traditional business/professional world. Never a bad thing	If an applicant is truly going to rank a program #1, I prefer the comment be relayed to the head of the selection committee by a faculty member who wrote a letter on the applicant's behalf.	I think the notes is both a courtesy and a way to communicate interest to a program. If someone takes the time to write a personal note, that demonstrates a higher level of interest.
I think thank you notes by applicants are inappropriate.	The candidates are busy enough without having to write thank you notes that will arrive after the committee has met.	At our institution a note would have no possible effect on ranking. Ranking is done before notes would be received.	If you write a thank you note then keep it "short and sweet"
It is a courtesy and reflects good manners. It also demonstrates real interest in a time where shotgun applications are prevalent.	Generally, I find that thank you notes never improve the ranking of an applicant and may harm.	Thank you notes are always appreciated and thank you notes are a sign of professionalism and character. Residency is only one stepping stone. Thank you notes should not be written with the idea that its contents will weigh on the committee's decision making but rather as an honest expression of thanks.	I feel inclined to tell the applicants not to bother sending them because all I do is throw them out without ever reading them, but I don't want to given an impression of not caring or being antisocial. I therefore let them send them and throw them out unopened.
I toss them out without opening them!	There is nothing wrong with sincere thank you notes. But our ranking occurs prior to the applicants getting to the airport after interview day. So they don't impact ranking at all. They are sometimes helpful on match day if content in the thank you note helps you understand the motivation of the applicant so there is a conversational starting point. But to be clear, they do not impact outcome. They are a courtesy only and seen as such.	In general, it seems that grateful, other-oriented people automatically write thank you notes. Advising residents to send notes will blur the human distinctions even more. One more activity to "check out" that will make them more and more the same. This should be a personal choice on the part of the resident.	

A

B

DISCUSSION

Based on the comments, faculty members remain divided on the viewpoint of writing thank you notes after ophthalmology residency interviews. By in large, thank you notes do not appear to impact the ranking of ophthalmology applicants following interviews and are not seen as a requirement. They do, however, remain an option for an applicant to show their genuine interest in a program and an opportunity for a program to receive further insight into an applicant's personality.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Conflicts of interest only for Michael A. Singer: Allergan, Allegro, Ampio, Genentech, Ophthotech, Regeneron, Santen, Aerpio, Optos, Alcon, Clearside, Notal Vision, Guidepoint, Alimera.

In accordance with Openventio Publishers policy and my ethical obligation as a researcher, I am reporting that Dr. Singer is a consultant for the following companies: Allergan, Genentech, Regeneron, Santen, Clearside, Aerpio, and Alimera. Dr. Singer is a Speakers Bureau for the following: Allergan, Genentech, and Regeneron. Dr. Singer is involved in research support with the following: Allergan, Genentech, Regeneron, Ampio, Optos, Aerpio, Allegro, and Diachii, and Clearside. These affiliations did not affect research reported in the enclosed paper. I have disclosed those interests fully to Openventio Publishers.

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SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

Survey Questions

- Background Questions of Survey Responder:

1. Location of residency program: will provide a map of the United States so they can choose region of the United States (northeast, west, Midwest, southeast, southwest). There will also an anonymous option if they would rather not disclose location.

2. Number of years after training of the survey responder or Title (only can choose one option):

- Chairman
- Residency Director
- Faculty member for <5 years
- Faculty member for 5-10 years
- Faculty member for >10 years

- Specific Thank You Note Questions:

1. Do you enjoy receiving thank you notes:

- No
- Yes, always
- Only if personalized
- Indifferent

2. Do thank you notes change your ranking of applicants:

- Never
- Yes (if choose yes then will be given other options as below and a comment box at the end)
- Mostly only results in lower ranking (poorly written etc...)
- Mostly only results in raising ranking
- Equally results in raising or lowering ranking

3. Would you recommend applicants write thank you notes:

- Yes
- No
- Yes. Only recommend writing one to tell your #1 program that you are ranking them #1
- Yes, only if personalized

4. If said yes to #3, which format would you recommend?

- Email
- Hand-written on paper
- Either is fine
- N/A (not recommend)

Comment section at the end of the survey