



Finding Your Match: One Student's Match Day Journey

No one forgets their Match Day.

Match Day, the highly anticipated third Thursday in March, marks the occasion when fourth-year medical students across America simultaneously open their envelopes and discover to which residency program they have been assigned. This computer-generated assignment will influence many aspects of the student's life for the next three to seven years and will likely determine the trajectory of their medical careers. It is a day awaited with great emotion, stress, anxiety, and excitement.

For Drexel University College of Medicine fourth-year student Kimberly Tustison and her family, Match Day 2010 held exciting promise. Tustison was specializing in obstetrics and gynecology at Drexel and was hoping to match in that field. Her top choice was the University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

Tustison was not merely concerned with her own professional development in terms of where she would be matched for her residency. She has been married for 13 years and is the mother of two young children. "For me it was complicated by my husband's job," she explained. "My husband was offered a job at UVA already. So he has been waiting to find out whether or not I match there before he can accept the job." Her second through eighth choices were all in the Philadelphia area.

Before Match Day Tustison acknowledged that "the stress was on me" in terms of matching with her first choice, since her husband already had the promise of a secure job there. "I've got to match where he can continue to further his career, as well as make the most of mine. Location is a really important factor in the decision," she said.

Yet location is only one of the many factors students must weigh when considering their potential residency programs. Family needs, academic reputation, professional development, and quality-of-life issues, just to mention a few, are all dynamics medical students must evaluate as they determine their ranking system.

"You have to prioritize," Tustison stated. "In the end you have to prioritize what is the most important, whether it's your quality of life or whether it's the academic reputation of the place you want to go.... Once you have your priorities in line, it's easy to follow through putting everything in line so your priorities can be met. I definitely chose quality of life."



Tustison elaborated on that decision, saying, "It's a difficult balance to decide what is going to give you the quality of life you want. You have to know yourself well to know what kind of residents you'll get along with. You have to know how the program is structured and what the schedule is like and how that will fit in with your lifestyle. All those things are important."

The pathway directors in the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department were very willing to offer guidance and support during the year-long interview process, Tustison said. "Everyone in the department felt very supported. I don't think any of us were worried that we weren't going to match at all."

For Tustison, the best way to prepare for the nebulosity of Match Day was to solidly prepare for what she could: the interviews. "The only preparing you can do leads up to the interviews.... After that there's no preparing."

Despite the potential anxiety and fear produced by Match Day, Tustison entered into it with a spirit of excitement. Having helped at the event a few years ago, she was well aware of the public nature of the ceremony. Some of her colleagues had decided they would open their envelopes in private for that reason.

Yet Tustison stated unequivocally that she "absolutely believes" in the Match Day process. Laughing, she said that initially she wondered if she could "really trust the system." Then her husband, a computer programmer, "was able to explain [the algorithm] to me so that I fully trust that it would come out the best possibility for me. I was confident in it. I ranked the programs I wanted to be in, in the order I wanted to be there.... I knew it would be the best that I could get."

Then on March 18, after years of preparation, Tustison and her peers finally learned their residency match. At a reception hosted by the College of Medicine on the Queen Lane Campus, students simultaneously opened their envelopes among family, friends, and faculty. "I could feel the energy in the room," Tustison said. "Everybody was really anxious. We were just waiting until they said 'Open the envelope.'"

The unforgettable moment had arrived.

For Tustison, the preparation had paid off. She matched at her first choice, the University of Virginia. "As soon as I opened my envelope and found out I had matched at the University of Virginia, my husband grabbed my laptop. While I ran around congratulating everyone, my husband was busy emailing our Realtor, a new lender, and a Realtor in Virginia. Thank heavens for Drexel being *the* 'Technology University'!

"There was so much excitement, people jumping up and down, screaming.... It was really fun," she observed happily. "I was really excited.... I thought I knew I'd be going [to UVA], but I wasn't sure, and you just never know until you know.... It was a really exciting time.... It was a nice surprise to get my number one."

To celebrate the pivotal event, Tustison and some friends attended a school-sponsored party, and then continued on to Atlantic City. The party atmosphere did not last long, however. "Right now there's a lot of paperwork," she says. "I've already been asked to request my vacation weeks for the next year. Credentialing has begun."

Tustison and her peers, the 254 members of the Drexel University College of Medicine Class of 2010, are one giant step closer to realizing their dream of becoming doctors.

"One thing that I thought was interesting was all of the physicians [at the College's Match Day reception], commented, 'I still remember my Match Day.' It's been going on forever, and it seems like it is such a formative day in their career. People really seem to remember it forever."

