FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – Neurosurgery 2019

Specialty/Field Questions:

1. a) What are some strengths about your specialty? What draws and keeps people in your specialty?

Fascinating anatomy and physiology, exciting surgery, and lifesaving interventions. Neurosurgeons operate throughout the body on brain, spinal cord, and peripheral nerves. A wide variety of pathologies are treated such as vascular abnormalities, tumors, trauma, epilepsy, spinal conditions, and congenital abnormalities. A variety of high-tech tools facilitate our practice.

b) What are some common complaints about your specialty?

Challenging cases – high acuity, sick patients requiring urgent intervention. Sometimes tragic outcomes can occur. Technically demanding.

2. Why did you choose your specialty?

Technical specialty with a wide degree of variety. Neurosurgery is not only concerned with restoring structure but also with maintaining function. Numerous avenues for research and scholarly pursuit – we know so little about the human brain.

3. What types of clinical cases do you commonly see?

Aneurysms, tumors, carotid stenosis, arteriovenous malformation, degenerative spinal conditions, traumatic brain injury

4. Briefly describe a typical day.

Varies – clinic days, OR days, catheter lab days, academic days for research or teaching

5. a) What are the varieties of lifestyles within your field?

There are neurosurgeons across Canada with wide ranges of practice volume and lifestyle. The key is to have a collegial practice group, which supports diverse interests and background among its members.

b) Specifically, how able is your specialty to accommodate family life?

Again, a variety of accommodations are available with a supportive group

6. Range of incomes?

Neurosurgeons are generally well compensated for their work. Salaries vary across the country.

7. How do you see your discipline changing over the next decade?

Increased use of technology. Emphasis on minimally invasive approaches. Treatment of a broader range of neurological illness.

Residency Program Questions:

8. a) What are you looking for specifically in an impressive candidate?

Hardworking, intelligent candidates who demonstrate a practical approach to emergencies and complex problems, as well as technical proficiency.

b) What can a potential candidate do now in order to be an appealing applicant to your program?

Electives, case presentations, research projects, attend neurosurgical rounds.

9. How is your residency program organized? (i.e. year by year breakdown and schedule of rotations)
10. What is your residency program’s orientation and focus?

Teaching, research, and clinical volume.

11. What is the availability of experiences in subspecialty areas during training?

All subspecialty experiences available at U of A – cerebrovascular (including endovascular), neurooncology, skull base (including endonasal approaches), pediatric neurosurgery, spinal neurosurgery, epilepsy and functional neurosurgery, trauma and neurointensive care and now radiosurgery (gamma knife).

12. Are there sufficient elective opportunities during training to explore your special interests? Yes

13. What is the on-call schedule during each year of residency?

As per PARA – ¼ in house call or 1/3 home call depending on rotation.

14. What distinguishes the U of A program from other programs?

Clinical volume, commitment to research, harmonious work environment, excellent teachers

15. a) Who can we contact for more information or to set up electives?

The Undergraduate Office of Surgical Education would be happy to answer any questions regarding student electives or shadowing. Please e-mail specsurg@ualberta.ca or go to www.ualberta.ca/surgery/education-programs/ose-undergraduate/electives for more information.

b) Specifically, is there a list of residents whom we can call or email?

This can be arranged on an individual basis.

16. How competitive is it to get in, and then to succeed in your field?

Entrance to neurosurgery is moderately competitive. Success in neurosurgery requires hard work and dedication.

17. a) Is there active and/or required research in your residency program?

We expect an annual research project from our residents. PGY4 is a research year where 6-12 months can be dedicated to research. Select candidates can prolong their research period to obtain graduate degrees.

b) What role does research play in your career?

Most Canadian neurosurgeons work in an academic centre where research output is expected.

18. What local, national or international conferences would be of benefit to candidates interested in your residency program?

CNSF – Canadian Congress of Neurological Sciences (June)
CNS – Congress of Neurological Surgeons (USA – October)
AANS – American Association of Neurological Surgeons (USA – April)

Various other national and international subspecialty meetings.