

Selecting the Best Family Medicine Residency Program that Supports Interest in Obstetrics

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Practicing obstetrics with family medicine is considered the road less traveled in family medicine. Currently, only ten percent of family medicine physicians provide pre-natal care and only about sixteen percent deliver babies.¹ Current ACGME residency review committee guidelines for family medicine require that family medicine residents perform forty deliveries before they graduate in order to achieve minimum competency in obstetrics.² The American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians no longer has a numerical requirement for vaginal deliveries before graduation.³ However, it is very interesting to note that maternity care and continuity deliveries are the number two reason for citations among family medicine residency programs. In a survey by family medicine program directors in the 1980's, over thirty percent thought that obstetrics care should be made optional.^{4,5} For the family medicine resident physicians who want to practice obstetrics, it is imperative to be well prepared and to get the most out of postgraduate training. Fellowship training in obstetrics through family medicine has a board certification through the American Board of Physician Specialties (ABPS). It requires a minimum of 100 vaginal deliveries and fifty cesarean sections in order to sit for the written and oral board exams.^{6,7,8} This article will focus on how to find family medicine residency programs, explaining the different types of obstetrics fellowships, what questions to ask during both family medicine residency and obstetrics fellowship interviews and finally, career paths after training.

Family Medicine Residency Programs

There are several websites that can aid in the search for family medicine residency programs and they include but are not limited to the American Academy of Family Physicians Residency Directory, American Osteopathic Association Opportunities website and FREIDA Online specialty training search.^{9,10,11} Although many would recommend narrowing down residency programs by location, when selecting residency programs that match your interest in obstetrics, it is important to not rule out programs by location. For example, a program may not be in an area that you are interested in but could have a maternity track that guarantees a certain number of vaginal deliveries or even a large number of deliveries per year. When it comes to obstetrics, it is important to have as much experience as possible to create a level of comfort and experience in performing different procedures that may be required. Experience as well as ability, training and competence are the components taken into consideration when delivery privileges are granted after training is complete.⁷ The vast majority of hospitals in this country require applicants for obstetrics privileges to be able to perform instrumental deliveries including cesarean sections. It is important to consider if you are interested in performing solely vaginal deliveries or operative deliveries. This is especially important when it comes to considering maternity tracks that only offer vaginal deliveries or simply assistance with cesarean sections.¹

Types of Obstetrics Fellowships

There are two types of fellowships that are available for family medicine residents who are interested in performing obstetrics. The first type is advanced obstetrics. This type of fellowship

provides a substantial amount of time in both labor and delivery with participation in both vaginal deliveries and cesarean sections. This may or may not include a longitudinal family medicine clinic experience. The fellow would work primarily with the obstetrics faculty and/or family medicine physicians who perform obstetrics and will be a part of the teaching of family medicine residents. There is also additional exposure to high risk obstetrics, abortion training at some programs and exposure to ultrasound.^{13,14,15} To practice modern-day obstetrics requires proficiency in ultrasound. The next type of fellowship is maternal child health which is similar to advanced obstetrics but also includes more pediatric exposure. This includes neonatal intensive care unit and newborn nursery experience. Some of these fellowships also have the option for a global experience as well as the option to simultaneously obtain a Masters in Public Health with an extra year.^{16,17} In addition, there are even some programs that allow for a full spectrum experience that includes some GI procedures.¹⁸

A comprehensive list of these fellowships can be found on the fellowship directory on the Academy of Family Physicians website. Despite the two different types of subsets, they are all listed under obstetrics fellowships.¹⁹ In addition, the Board of Certification in Family Medicine Obstetrics through the American Board of Physician Specialties has a list of fellowships that are recognized for board certification. It is important to note that the ABPS clinical track with board eligibility based on years of experience and volume of vaginal deliveries and cesarean sections will only be available until 2018.²⁰ After that date only board certification by the completion of an obstetrics fellowship will be available. The ability to care for a high risk obstetrics patient in 2016 cannot be overstated.

Important Questions to ask prospective programs that you are interested in:

What is the relationship of the family medicine program and obstetrics and gynecology program?

How are the family medicine residents treated while on the obstetrics and gynecology service?

What is the average number of deliveries (both vaginal and operative) deliveries that each resident or fellow obtains during their time of training?

How many total deliveries does the hospital and teaching institution have per year?

Is an obstetrics or maternity track available for interested residents? (Residency Question)

Is Cesarean Section participation and first assistant privilege available? (Residency Question)

How is prenatal care incorporated into the residency or fellowship curriculum?

Is high risk experience available if a resident or fellow is interested in learning more?

Is there opportunity to learn how to perform outpatient gynecologic procedures?

Where have previous trainees gone on to practice? Were they denied hospital privileges?

Track record of the training program.

Career Options

When it comes to practicing obstetrics with family medicine, it is important to note that there are different job types that are available. Practicing in a rural, underserved area is an option that is more likely to allow for cesarean privileges as well as GI procedures because there is often a shortage of doctors in these areas. Becoming a teaching attending at a family medicine residency program would give you the opportunity to practice in an academic setting but most likely with the backup of obstetricians and gynecologists. An important caveat to note is that cesarean privileges may or may not be granted. International medicine through organizations such as Doctors Without Borders will allow for an experience similar to a rural setting but is of course out of the United States and has varying lengths of commitment time. Lastly, you can join a practice either of family physicians or obstetricians and gynecologists where you have the ability to practice both family medicine and obstetrics. The most challenging part of anywhere you decide to practice will be obtaining hospital privileges. You can gear your residency and fellowship training toward your career goals.

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14. Primary Care Maternity Care Fellowship at Saint Joseph Hospital in Denver, Colorado. <http://www.saintjosephdenver.org/for-medical-professionals/graduate-medical-education/family-medicine/ob-fellowship/>
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