



## Endeavoring to Pursue GI Fellowship Late in the Game

Congratulations for deciding to pursue a career in the fascinating field of gastroenterology. Throughout medical school and early on in residency, people invariably ask you to decide on the field of your choice early on to help make your application competitive. However, if you have decided on this career path late in your residency then all is not lost yet. You can still work to embellish your application and make it attractive. In this section we will go through various strategies that can help increase your chances of matching in a GI fellowship.

Though it may seem daunting to build a competitive CV late in the course of residency training, the most important initial step involves the need to self-analyze or introspect. This obviously means a crystal clear understanding of why you want to pursue a career in gastroenterology and also acknowledging the reasons for coming to this decision later in the residency. Transparency is key here as program directors do understand that some residents may have not so traditional path, therefore, it becomes part of their story. Secondly you should determine your strengths and weaknesses as that helps you to plan accordingly. Finally, you should familiarize yourself with the application process and its time frame to ensure that your application is ready in time.

### **Finding a Mentor:**

This is a very crucial step and is not always easy to identify. There are different types of mentors: private practice, academics, research career, clinical career, education career, work-life balance and general mentoring advice and often time you would need more than one to help achieve your goals. Since you are late in the game research mentor is probably the most important at this stage as that would bolster your scholarly activities. Ideally start with looking at the GI faculty at your institute and potentially identifying mentors who share research interests identical and akin to yours. Since you don't have a lot of time you want to work with someone who is accessible and affable with a lot of research going and has the time to mentor you. You should speak to your peers as well to identify those who have been known to help the mentees. Further you could also discuss with your PD or IM faculty. Younger faculty may have the time to harness your research skills while a senior faculty may be able to facilitate networking at a national level. Once you have identified a potential mentor you should have a candid meeting. It is very important to be clear with your objectives at this point as well as your timeline. Further if the mentor understands your goals precisely, they would be able to commit to this relationship and both of you will gain in a meaningful way. Again don't be afraid to meet with more than one mentor as it is important to find an ideal match as they could potentially be the one whom you ask to write a letter of recommendation. Finally, if you are already working with a non GI faculty as a mentor that is still okay and holds merit.

Also if you are in a program that doesn't have a GI division or fellowship you could join national societies to help find a mentor from outside your faculty. The ACG has a mentoring program for both residents and in training fellows that provides them with access to diverse faculty. Further you should also attempt to do an away rotation at an outside facility to help foster connections with the department there and you could potentially identify a mentor or a letter writer. When choosing a facility for away rotation I would go with facility which meets your requirement for a fellowship as your goal is to not only get exposed to various GI pathology but also impress the faculty to obtain an interview. Again these away rotations needs months of advance notice and planning especially if in a different state and depending on how late you are in your residency you may or may not have time for it.

### **Scholarly Activity:**

This is one of the most important aspects of an application that makes the applicant stand out and is connected to finding an ideal mentor. Again, if you have decided on pursuing GI fellowship later in residency, you may not have extensive research in GI, and that is okay! What the majority of programs are looking for in scholarly work is how well you understand the work you are doing and what your role was in the project. There are various types of scholarly activities that you can be involved in such as case reports/ review articles and research studies (retrospective or prospective). Though research studies carry more weight than case reports but if you are starting late you need to discuss with your mentor to choose projects that are easily and quickly accomplished and can be published or presented at national conferences to help gain maximum merit. If you are working with mentors outside your facility, then working on projects such as review articles and meta-analyses might be more feasible. Be aware of the submission deadlines for various national conferences as well so you don't miss the deadline.

### **Letters of Recommendation:**

It is an important aspect of your resume which provides a clue into how good of a candidate you really are. Ideally you want someone who has known you for long time to write the letter as they can better describe your strengths and skill set in detail. You can upload up to 4 letters and one of them is from your internal medicine program director. This letter provides an insight to your medical knowledge, physical examination skills and your ability to work well with your peers and is one of the most important letters. Hence it is crucial that you perform well in your residency in order to get a strong and winsome letter. While there is no magic number for how many of the letter writers should be GI faculty, ideally having at least 2-3 letters from GI faculty members would be reasonable. However, if you have not had the chance to work with them closely it is better to have an IM faculty with whom you have been working closely and who will write you a strong letter as compared to a GI faculty who does not know your strengths as well. Again, when you select mentors either within the institute or externally do communicate with them early on that you are hoping for a letter from them so they can work with you to achieve that. Please remember that the content of the letter and how it amplifies your strengths matters more than who wrote it.

**Personal Statement:**

This is where you not only describe your strengths and weaknesses but also provide an insight into your reasons for deciding to pursue a career in gastroenterology. Most importantly you should not hide the fact that you decided on GI late in your residency as PDs do understand that for some residents the decision can oscillate. Own your decisions and letter readers will appreciate honesty and in fact it may make you a more interesting candidate whom they would really like to meet.

Applying to gastroenterology fellowship is an exciting time but starting late in the game can make it excruciating if the outlined precautions are not taken. However, identifying your mentor and participating in scholarly work as early as possible can be the key. Further spend time on your personal statement and identify your letter writers as early as possible. Finally familiarize yourself with the deadlines for the application process in order to get your application in time.