



**American Association of Neuromuscular & Electrodiagnostic Medicine
Neuromuscular Fellowship Application Process**

In neurology and physical medicine and rehabilitation residency programs, residents are offered fellowship positions before they are provided adequate time to experience what neuromuscular medicine or clinical neurophysiology has to offer them as a career and how they can benefit patients by specializing in this area of medicine. The current system of asking residents to choose a fellowship before their PGY3 year is unfair to the residents or the programs seeking to attract candidates in the specialty area. To address this issue, over the last 2 years, surveys have been sent to neuromuscular fellowship directors, graduating residents, and neurology program directors to identify a better system. In addition, recently, there have been discussions of neuromuscular fellowship directors, members of the AANEM Board, the Neuromuscular Section Leadership, and house officers to come to census for a change to the application system. The below plan is a result of these efforts.

SUMMARY OF RULES

- Neuromuscular medicine programs will review fellowship applications no sooner than March 1, 2021 and each March 1 thereafter.
- Offers for interviews will not be made or scheduled before March 1, 2021 and each March 1 thereafter.
- Programs may offer positions to candidates no sooner than June 1, 2021 and each June 1 thereafter.
- Applicants will have up to 48 hours to decide whether or not to accept a position.

Programs that participate in the program will list this on their website:

“Our program is committed to abiding by the following fellowship application process – interview offers will not be made before March 1 of the year prior to the fellowship start date. Fellowship positions will not be offered before June 1 of the year prior to the fellowship start date. Violations of this will result in removal of our institution from the AANEM NM Fellowship Portal.”

Process

- All programs that have committed to be part of the portal and input their information will be listed in the portal. There will be a link in the portal to a list of all ACGME NM Fellowship programs to identify any programs that are not participating. The information for your program will be live in the portal as soon as you input the data. A reminder will be sent to the NM training program director listed in the portal each January advising you to review your information in the portal. If your information is not reviewed, your institution will be removed from the portal.
- In early August 2020 and at regular intervals thereafter, AANEM will send NM fellowship directors an email communicating the recommendations, the rationale for the recommendations, and a list of participating programs. AANEM will send emails to all residents that are members of the AANEM notifying them about the portal and the process for applying to programs.
- The American Academy of Neurology (AAN) plans to email their GME constituents (residents, fellowship directors, program directors, coordinators, and department chairs) three times per year, approximately August 2020, November 2020, and February 2021. These emails will contain information about how to link to the AANEM NM Fellowship Portal.
- A Neuromuscular Medicine Fellowship Committee will be created to oversee the process made up of some NM training program directors and others that are not NM training program directors to eliminate any competitive bias.
- There will be a place on the portal to report violations of the agreed upon rules.
- Each institution will need to acknowledge to be bound by the following rules:

Institution Rules of Participation

By participating in this application and offer portal service provided by AANEM, the institution agrees to be bound by the following rules. If AANEM learns, through uncontroverted evidence (such as a copy of a letter or email sent to a potential fellow), that a Training Program Director violated the agreed timeline for communicating interview offers or position offers to fellowship applicants or other NM Fellowship portal service rules, the evidence of such violation will be sent to the Neuromuscular Medicine Fellowship Committee (the Committee) to consider whether the evidence warrants removal of the institution from the NM Fellowship portal site. If the majority of the Committee agrees that the evidence shows that the institution violated the rules, the AANEM will send written notice to the training program director and the chair of the department, informing them of the AANEM's proposed decision to remove the institution from the portal and providing the institution with 10 days to submit a written response showing that the information on which the proposed removal is based is erroneous or that there is some other compelling reason to reverse the Committee's proposed decision. If the institution does not provide a timely response, the proposed decision will be final and the institution will be removed from the portal for the remainder of the year in which the violation occurred and the year following the violation. The institution can reapply for participation in the portal. If the institution provides information rebutting the evidence of violation, the Committee will review the information and determine whether to affirm or reverse its proposed decision. If the Committee reverses its proposed decision, the matter will be closed, and the institution will be allowed to remain on the NM Fellowship portal site. If the Committee decides to affirm the proposed decision, the determination will be forwarded to the AANEM Board of Directors for review. If the Board reverses the Committee's proposed decision, the institution will be allowed to continue participating in the NM Fellowship portal. If the Board approves the Committee's recommended decision, the Board's decision will be final, and the institution will be removed from the site for the remainder of the year in which the violation occurred and the following year. The institution may reapply for participation in the NM Fellowship portal. In addition, AANEM may, in its discretion, notify Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) of a final determination of the institution's violation if the AANEM determines that the circumstances warrant such notification.

As a condition of participating in the NM Fellowship portal service, the institution releases and waives any claims it has or may have against AANEM or its officers, directors, or employees, and waives any right to sue any of them based on the institution's participation in the NM Fellowship portal service, any final decision by AANEM to remove the institution for a violation of the service rules adjudicated in accordance with the foregoing procedures, a decision by AANEM to report such decision to the ACGME, or for any other claim related to the institution's use of the service.

- Each applicant will need to acknowledge to be bound by similar rules.

DETAILED RULES

- Application review and interviews

- Neuromuscular medicine programs will review fellowship applications and contact applicants to offer interviews after March 1, 2021 and every March 1 thereafter. **No interview can be offered before this date.**
- Applicants will be able to submit applications after the March 1 deadline through the AANEM NM Fellowship portal.
- There is no limit to the number of interviews a program can offer.
- Interviews
 - The expectation is that most interviews will take place in March, April, or May 2021 and each year thereafter, creating a standard 3-month interview season.
 - There is no mandated end-date for interviews.
- Offers
 - **The AANEM portal will automate the offer process. Details will be provided once the process is finalized. See a sneak peek below in the FAQ section.**
 - Programs will begin to offer available positions to applicants at 11 am EST on June 1, 2021. This is the earliest offer date no matter when the interview takes place.
 - Programs may distribute as many offers as they have available positions.
 - When offering a position to an applicant, the applicant has 48 hours to make a decision. An applicant may accept or reject an offer before 48 hours has passed, but cannot be compelled to do so. Thus, no candidate can be required to make a decision before 11 am on June 3, 2021.
 - Internal applicants will also be given until June 3, 2021 to decide so that they have an opportunity to vet external programs if they so choose.
 - If an applicant turns down an offer before the 48-hour time period has passed, the program may immediately offer the available position to another applicant.
 - If an applicant does not respond within the given time period, this will be considered a rejection.
 - Any offers have to be accepted by December 31. The portal will then be available for the next year.

Enforcement

- In early August 2020, the AANEM will share the list of participating programs and a list of the ACGME approved NM Fellowship with all Training Program Directors. AANEM will also communicate who has joined the program through social media channels. Training Program Directors will be asked to forward the information to their residents. AANEM will notify residents that are members of the AANEM.
- If there are changes to this list, they will be shared with the same stakeholders.
- Stakeholders will be informed that if they are aware of a resident receiving an interview offer before March 1 or a fellowship position offer before June 1, to report that using the portal.
- If a program is determined to be in violation, their AANEM application portal listing will be removed, and their full use of the portal will be forfeited for the year of the violation.

Frequently Asked Questions:

How will the portal work?

- Visit <https://www.aanem.org/Careers/Fellowships> to see videos for institutions and applicants that explain the process.

Why wait until March 1 to review applications?

- Benefits to Residents:
 - Ensure time for all residents to experience the breadth of neurological subspecialties including neuromuscular medicine before they have to make a decision regarding their career path.
 - Gives them time to complete subspecialty rotations, get informed LORs from faculty in those fields, and perhaps complete specialty-focused research projects that may boost their applications.
 - It will eliminate the timeline creep where they feel they need to apply early before all the good spots are gone.
- Benefits to programs
 - Having a candidate pool of residents who are better informed regarding their subspecialty of choice. Residents will be much more likely to have experienced neuromuscular or EMG rotations by March than by August of their PGY3 year, and it will give them time to understand about this important field of medicine and why our members chose this field.
 - If interview season were later, residents would be away at interviews in July and August, when their leadership is needed at their home institution with the new junior residents.

Why wait until June 1 to offer positions?

- Benefits to residents
 - Most importantly, having three months for interviews eliminates the pressure residents may feel to be forced to accept a fellowship offer before being able to fully vet other programs of interest.
 - When we reviewed the surveys and looked at fields outside of medicine, we came to realize that three months for interviews is a standard timeline, so we did not think that extending the offer date to August 1 conferred additional benefit.
- Benefits to programs
 - Allow time for training programs to appropriately vet a larger cohort of fellowship candidates interested in their training program before making a decision.
 - Lessen the chance of a fellowship candidate making a last minute decision to decline an already accepted offer to train.

Will clinical neurophysiology programs be included in the portal?

- Recognizing that there is some overlap between applicants to neuromuscular medicine and Clinical Neurophysiology, AANEM will discuss with American Clinical Neurophysiology Society (ACNS), using the AANEM portal for clinical neurophysiology fellowships that are electrodiagnostic medicine focused. Adding this to the portal would not be difficult.

Why not wait another year or two, to see if other fields in neurology or physical medicine and rehabilitation will adopt the same timeline simultaneously?

- There is particular urgency to enact this timeline now, because resident exposure to neuromuscular medicine has been impacted by the pandemic. It is difficult to cultivate interest in neuromuscular medicine without in-person outpatient experiences and exposure to

electrodiagnostic medicine. In recent months, residents may have been pulled from previously-scheduled outpatient experiences. In other cases, outpatient programs were shut down or transitioned to virtual visits only.

- These deficits may be ameliorated by giving residents more time before submitting fellowship applications.

Should neuromuscular medicine consider a traditional fellowship match through the NRMP or SFMatch?

- A traditional match would have several advantages, including a guaranteed unified timeline.
- Our main goal has been to facilitate building consensus so we can enact meaningful change now, and there is not currently enough support for a match to move forward with one.
- In a recent survey of Neuromuscular Fellowship directors, 38% of the 44 responders favored a match, and the remainder were either neutral (33%) or did not want a match (29%).
- We hope that the neuromuscular community uses this year's experience to inform conversations about a traditional match in subsequent years.

Neuromuscular medicine is uniquely poised to lead the way and prove that application timeline reform is possible. This is the right thing to do for our field, and we will continue to work together transparently to ensure that the process is fair and beneficial for applicants, for programs, and for our field.

Sincerely,

Yuen T. So, MD
AANEM President on behalf
of the AANEM Board