

From White Coats to White Envelopes

UC San Diego Medical Students Receive Residency Assignments

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Kim Edwards

Graduating medical student Ann Ha has a great reason to love her alma mater, UC San Diego School of Medicine. While studying to be a pediatric physician, she met and married fellow student, Wesley Tran, who plans to be an orthopedic surgeon.

"We got married in a Buddhist ceremony before our third year of medical school and we're planning a Catholic ceremony in May, with an even bigger reception," said Ha.

And now, they'll have even more to celebrate.

On Thursday morning, March, 20, 2008, at 10 a.m., Ha and Tran tore open two of the white envelopes waiting on a table in the Jack Farris Student Lounge at UC San Diego's School of Medicine. The letters inside revealed that after they graduate, both will pursue their residency training at Harbor-UCLA Hospital.

"It's exactly what we hoped for. Our number one choice. We'll be together!" said Ha.

They were just two of 125 UC San Diego medical students in their final year of study who learned the location of their residency training program on this "Match Day," a nation-wide event that occurs simultaneously at medical schools across the United States. Nationwide, 15,000 senior medical students begin applying to residency programs at the beginning of their final year in medical school. The National Residency Matching Program (NRMP) creates optimal matches of residents to programs, with 94% of seniors this year matched to a program of their choice.

The 2008 graduating class at UC San Diego School of Medicine consists of 51 women and 74 men; eight of whom are "double threats," graduating with M.D./PhDs. Another 5 students delayed graduation, by one year, in order to graduate with an M.D. and an M.A.S. (Masters in Advanced Science). One student extended his studies by one year to receive his Masters in Public Health at Harvard University. Along with California, students matched in Iowa, New York, Tennessee, Arkansas, Connecticut, Idaho, Nevada, Washington, Florida, North Carolina, Hawaii, Louisiana, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Texas and Oregon.

In the midst of popping champagne bottles, Jonathan Neyer's mom threw her arms around her lanky son's neck, her eyes already brimming with tears. "UCLA!" Jonathan got his first choice, a placement he's wanted since he was 12 years old.

"That's when he started thinking about becoming a doctor," said Neyer's mom, Barbara Kingston. "I work in a senior living community right across the street from UCLA Medical Center. Jonathan's friends joke that they're going to have to buy me an ankle bracelet with GPS so they know when I'm coming to visit." Neyer plans to practice internal medicine.

"Take this time to reflect on the road you've traveled since you first received your white coat," said Jess Mandel, M.D., Associate Dean for Undergraduate Medical Education. "Sometimes it was bumpy, sometimes smooth, and sometimes time seemed suspended. So look at this day as a day of triumph."

Vice Dean for Medical Education, Maria Savoia, M.D., told the crowd "We have mixed emotions about this day. We're proud of you and we want you to graduate but we'll miss you and don't want you to leave." Some grads won't go far. 74 percent of this year's class will remain in California. 22 percent will remain at UCSD, including Christine Montesa. "UCSD was one of my top picks. I'm happy to be staying," said Montesa, who plans to become a cardiothoracic surgeon (CT).

No matter what the future holds, Montesa is already grateful for two perfect matches in her life. In college, she met her husband, who is now the Nurse Manager at UC San Diego Medical Center's Thornton Hospital ICU. Then, early in her medical school career, Montesa paired up with CT surgeon, Michael Madani, M.D., associate clinical professor of surgery, UC San Diego School of Medicine, and UC San Diego Medical Center's 2006 Physician of the Year. Montesa says she couldn't have received a better match in this mentor. "He is a great role model and very humble man."

And now, Montesa, and her classmates, will no doubt carry on that UC San Diego dedication to medical excellence.

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