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# Going Virtual: Redesigning the Interview Experience

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Since early March, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has led to substantial changes in the practice of radiology and secondarily radiological education. By mid-May, both the Coalition on Physicians Accountability's Workgroup on Medical Students in the Class of 2021 and the Association of American Medical Colleges [1] strongly recommended that all residency programs conduct virtual interviews for applicants and "commit to creating a robust digital environment and set of tools to yield the best experiences for programs and applicants."

## GIVEN THIS NEW REALITY, WHAT ADVICE CAN BE OFFERED TO OPTIMIZE THE VIRTUAL RESIDENCY INTERVIEW EXPERIENCE?

### Program Director perspective, Asim Mian, MD, Boston University Medical Center

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a sea of change in the world—from simple social interactions with friends and family to the way radiology is practiced and trainees are educated. This new virtual world has now permeated to the radiology interview season as the Association of American Medical Colleges has "strongly recommended" residency programs

conduct interviews virtually for this cycle and possibly beyond. This is an opportunity to reinvent, recalibrate, and even improve upon an archaic and cumbersome system that places undue burdens on radiology applicants and programs.

Similar to the traditional in-person interviews, the critical components for virtual interviews are planning and execution. These include but are not limited to the following components:

1. Creativity: Be unique; pop out and highlight program strengths using virtual technology. Consider incorporating interview day breakout rooms focusing on specific groups such as women in radiology, underrepresented minorities, research, teaching, and more.
2. Scheduling: Meticulously plan an interview itinerary that has been practiced before the virtual visit to ensure feasibility and smooth transition from one segment to another. An organized operation goes a long way in leaving a positive impression on applicants!
3. Familiarity with technology: Inform and prepare the applicant and faculty about the virtual platform. Provide technical support numbers. Ensure adequate lighting, camera, and microphone function.

4. Virtual tours: A professionally produced virtual tour of the department and medical campus can give applicants the opportunity to "walk" the grounds and leave an impression that the program is invested and proud of what they have to offer. There is a cost but this is significantly less than expenses incurred on meals and outings for in-person visits.

5. Virtual evening get-together: In lieu of afternoon or evening gatherings, consider holding a virtual get-together for residents and applicants that allows applicants an opportunity to freely mingle and get a "feel" for the program.

Change is challenging, but the pandemic has given us a unique opportunity to create a new paradigm for the residency interview season, which very well may become the new normal.

### Resident perspective, Shadi A. Esfahani, MD, MPH, Massachusetts General Hospital

How can current residents contribute to the new virtual residency interview experience at their institution? Although in-person human interactions will be affected, virtual

interviews can provide applicants with opportunities to have more frequent communications with current residents. Because a virtual interview season will reduce applicants' worry about the financial aspects and emotional burden of traveling, applicants can channel their energy into reaching out to a program's residents to make stronger connections. It is unclear how evolving political, institutional, and departmental guidelines will impact the next class of interns and residents. Therefore, it will be crucial for applicants to connect with both first-year and more senior residents before, during, and after their interviews.

First-year residents can provide helpful information about how the residency program is modifying schedules and adapting to the different phases of the pandemic, including issues related to resident education, communication, and supervision on a day-to-day basis. On the other hand, more senior residents might have different perspectives given their familiarity with the system, coworkers, and the overall workflow of the department. Thus, they can provide applicants with information about what they should expect as a part of the radiology family as well as the overall structure and function of the program with and without considering the role of COVID-19. These perspectives will complement the discussions with faculty members and junior residents. Connections with residents will be enhanced by arranging both one-on-one and group meetings to facilitate conversations that guide applicants with finding their top-choice residency programs for training and growing as future leaders of our field.

### **Medical student perspective, Jiun-Yiing Hu, MD, MSc, University of Maryland Medical Center**

Given varying state reopening timelines, residency programs should commit early to conducting virtual interviews. To provide equal opportunities for all applicants, in-person visits should be discouraged to prevent a two-tiered system in which only applicants with capital and living in states without travel restrictions benefit from in-person face time. Additionally, applicants should not be expected to place their health at risk to improve their match prospects.

To ensure a smooth interview experience, programs should clearly articulate the steps for between-session navigation, platform used, and contingency plans for potential IT issues. Both applicants and interviewers should be encouraged to trial software in advance. It is important for interviewers to remember that not all applicants have access to "interview-appropriate" spaces at home, including unreliable broadband in some resource-poor settings.

Applicants are concerned about how they will determine program fit from miles away. Underrepresented applicants especially need to know that they will be safe and supported. To that end, programs should maximize online availability of information and experiences, detailing support infrastructure and steps for cultivating an inclusive, just work environment, and highlight unique aspects in efficient interview days.

Program culture is conveyed through resident interactions and the responsiveness of leadership to change. Invite residents to record videos showcasing who they are, what they have accomplished, and how leadership has supported their class. A live residents' panel with good-humored

get-to-know-you questions and applicant participation enables students to assess their fit, and smaller breakout sessions allow for more intimate conversation. Consider a virtual second look for minorities.

Assist applicants in envisioning life in the program through a video tour showcasing facilities and mini-interviews featuring faculty, staff, and residents, photographs of events, and resident-filmed day-in-the-life video logs. A Google Map with pins of hospital sites, neighborhoods, and notes by residents and faculty of their favorite places will allow applicants to virtually explore the city.

### **SUMMARY**

In summary, since the Association of American Medical Colleges' announcement strongly recommending that all residency programs conduct virtual interviews, programs have been exploring ways to design a virtual interview season that will allow both the applicant and program to find a mutual fit. Ensuring a smooth interview experience requires programs to communicate the platform and technical support to applicants and faculty in advance of the scheduled interview day. In addition to faculty interviews, breakout rooms during and after the virtual interview will allow applicants to learn more about specific groups and interests (eg, women in radiology, diversity, research, teaching). One-on-one and group meetings with current residents can also help applicants gain an insider's view of what it would be like to train at the institution. A video tour of the institution, department, and city and interactive tools (eg, an online trivia game about the program) will ensure that applicants have the most up-to-date and accurate information to guide their decision regarding program ranking, and ultimately, the match.

## REFERENCE

1. The Coalition for Physician Accountability's Work Group on Medical Students in the Class of 2021 Moving Across Institutions for Post Graduate Training. Final report and recommendations for medical education institutions of LCME-accredited, U.S. osteopathic, and non-U.S. medical school applicants Available at: [https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-05/covid19\\_Final\\_Recommendations\\_05112020.pdf](https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-05/covid19_Final_Recommendations_05112020.pdf). Accessed June 14, 2020.

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