

June 1, 2020

APDEM Recommended Interview Plan for the 2020 Recruitment Season

Dear Program Director,

APDEM Council and the recently convened APDEM COVID Task Force have considered whether our association should advocate for 100% virtual interviews in 2020.¹ The APDEM COVID Task Force is comprised of 22 program directors, specifically selected to achieve broad representative diversity. APDEM formulated and circulated a pro-con argument (ref). In late May, APDEM conducted a survey regarding 100% virtual interviews, and a clear majority (77%) of program director (PD) respondents² favored this approach. However, a sizable minority of PD respondents (23%) favored a combination of virtual and in-person interviews. In addition, a majority (60%) of fellow respondents³ favored a combination of virtual and in-person interviews. Fellows were chosen as a proxy for potential fellowship applicants. The overwhelming majority of PD and fellow respondents favored transparency on an individual program level.

In light of the survey results, and based on APDEM COVID Task Force discussions and APDEM Council deliberations, APDEM Council requests that all programs carefully consider the following during the 2020 recruitment season.

Regarding equity among candidates

Some candidates will not feel comfortable traveling due to, for example, personal or family-related health concerns; some candidates may be prohibited from traveling by their institutional leaders and/or governmental authorities; and some candidates may not have the means to travel due to financial hardship. For these reasons, candidates will have unequal abilities to attend in-person interviews. Candidates may also feel that declining an in-person interview invitation will be interpreted as a lack of interest. We also recognize that we may be more likely to be positively influenced by personal interactions (vs. virtual interactions). Thus, we are concerned that candidates who visit programs in-person may have an unfair advantage over those candidates who do not.

Regarding equity among programs⁴

Compared to virtual interviews, in-person interviews almost certainly offer a greater opportunity to attract candidates. However, not all programs will be able to offer in-person interviews. Programs have been and may in the future be unequally affected by COVID-19-related restrictions, and such restrictions do not relate to the strengths or weaknesses of said training programs. Thus, there is concern that some programs will be unfairly disadvantaged by their inability to accommodate in-person visits.

Given these significant concerns, APDEM Council suggests that ALL programs, including those who can accommodate in-person visits, adopt the following interview plan:

- All interviews should be performed virtually, including for internal and local candidates. A virtual interview and virtual visit toolkit have been developed by the APDEM COVID Task Force and are available to programs (ref).
- Programs should devise a system of evaluation that exclusively relies on the candidate's application and her/his virtual interview.
- Programs should institute processes to limit unconscious bias in the virtual interview process.
- Programs should not require any candidate to make an in-person visit of any sort.
- Programs should allow in-person visits only when requested by the candidate.
- Any in-person visit should be an *informational* visit (e.g., tour of facilities) rather than a *recruitment* visit. In-person visits could include brief greetings with program coordinator, program director and/or associate program director, current fellows, and a tour of clinics and hospital. However, in person-visits should not

¹ Such an approach was endorsed for residency interviews by the [Coalition for Physician Accountability's Work Group](#).

² APDEM received 103 unique responses from PDs, representing approximately 69% of all PDs.

³ APDEM received 92 unique responses from fellows (14-17% of all current fellows). Since a small minority of fellows participated in the APDEM survey, these results should be interpreted cautiously.

⁴ We suggest that programs should make this statement available to all candidates selected for an interview.

include formal interviews; extended meetings with program faculty, program director, associate program director, fellows, or program coordinator; or meals with fellows and/or faculty. No attempt should be made to personally influence a candidate's rank order list during these informational visits.

- Programs should adopt and uphold a policy that (a) an in-person visit will not improve a candidate's position on a rank order list, and (b) the absence of an in-person visit will not harm a candidate's position on a rank order list. (Programs should be able to move a candidate down on their rank order list based on negative in-person interactions.)
- Candidates should be asked to judge programs—and how they compare to each other—on the basis of publicly-available information (e.g., website), written information provided to candidates, and virtual interview interactions.
- Visiting candidates should be asked to resist the temptation to move a program up on their rank order list based on any positive in-person interactions alone. (Candidates should of course be given full permission to move a program down on their rank order list based on any negative in-person interactions.)
- For reasons of equity and transparency, and as supported by the overwhelming majority of program directors responding to APDEM's survey,⁵ APDEM requests that all programs explicitly advertise:
 - On your program's webpage
 - On ERAS (<https://services.aamc.org/eras/erasaccount/>)
 - On FREIDA (www.aamc.org/gmetrack)
- How you plan to approach interviews for the 2020 recruitment season. **In particular, we recommend that all programs explicitly advertise their interview plans, including whether they will adopt 100% virtual interviews and whether they can/will accommodate in-person visits. If a program plans to accommodate in-person visits, we also recommend that the program explicitly advertises the following:**
 - How in-person visit invitations will be approached;
 - What in-person visits will involve;
 - Whether and how any in-person visit might impact a resident's candidacy; and
 - How the program might try to mitigate the potential bias they might experience in favor of in-person interactions.

If a program chooses to adopt APDEM'S interview plan, they may also provide a link to this document ([link](#)), which will be made available on the APDEM website.

Summary

APDEM Council along with other graduate medical education stakeholders (<https://acgme.org/Newsroom/Newsroom-Details/ArticleID/10252/Coalition-for-Physician-Accountability-Publishes-Recommendations-for-2020-2021>) endorses **100% virtual interviews** for the 2020-21 interview season. However, APDEM does not wish to prohibit a candidate from **visiting and touring** a program in-person, when doing so is judged (by the candidate) to be critically-important for her/his decision-making and when doing so is locally permitted and can be done safely. **We fervently request that all programs willingly adopt APDEM'S interview plan in order to maximize equity for all candidates and programs while allowing flexibility based on local circumstances and applicant preference.**

⁵ In the recent APDEM survey, the vast majority of PD respondents (96%) indicated that they would be willing to openly advertise their program's intentions regarding 2020 interviews, and the vast majority of fellow respondents (99%) indicated that this practice would be useful.

Sincerely,
APDEM Council

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