

APDEM Recommended Interview Plan for the 2021 Fellowship Recruitment Season

Dear Program Director,

APDEM Council and the Fellowship Recruitment Subcommittee (FRS) of the APDEM COVID Task Force have considered what interview format to encourage for the 2021 interview season. The FRS is composed of 8 program directors (PDs), specifically selected to achieve broad representative diversity. In late April, APDEM conducted a survey of both PDs and recently matched fellows to gauge preferences with regards to 2021 interview logistics. A clear majority of both PDs (84%) and incoming fellows (88%) favored having a virtual option available, with 88% of PDs favoring a unified model of interviewing across fellowship programs. A subsequent live poll was conducted among PDs during the APDEM national meeting (late April) where a clear majority (>72%) favored all virtual interviews (with optional in-person tours) as opposed to a hybrid model.

The Coalition for Physician Accountability (CoPA) released a recommendation in April 2021 that all interviews should be conducted in a virtual fashion *only* for the 2021 recruitment season. No specific comment was made on in-person tours/visits

In June 2021 the Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine (AAIM) released guidance wherein they strongly recommend that fellowship programs conduct virtual interviews for all applicants, including learners at one's own institution. Their guidance can be found here: <https://www.im.org/resources/ume-gme-program-resources/resources-fellowship-application>

Given our survey results, recommendations from other organizations, and the concerns below, APDEM encourages *all* endocrine fellowship programs to strongly consider 100% virtual interviews for *all* applicants in the 2021 recruitment season.

Regarding equity among candidates

While vaccination rates have increased and COVID infections are currently declining in most locales, the pandemic remains active and future trends remain difficult to predict, especially with easing of public health measures such as universal masking. As such, some candidates may still not feel comfortable traveling due to personal or family-related health concerns; some candidates may continue to have travel restricted by institutional/governmental policies or financial considerations. For these reasons, candidates will have unequal abilities to attend in-person interviews. Candidates may also feel that declining an in-person interview will be interpreted as a lack of interest in the program. The FRS also recognizes that PDs may be more positively influenced by personal interactions (vs. virtual interactions). Thus, the FRS remains concerned that candidates who visit programs in-person may be ranked higher over candidates who do not.

Regarding equity among programs

Compared to virtual interviews, in-person interviews likely offer a greater opportunity to attract candidates. It is likely that not all programs will be able to offer in-person interviews this year, as the FRS suspects that programs will be unequally affected by local/institutional COVID-related restrictions. Thus, there is concern that some programs may be disadvantaged by their inability to accommodate in-person visits.

As programs may still choose to accommodate in-person visits, APDEM **suggests that ALL programs, including those who choose to 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 (please see [toolkit](#)).

- 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. (please see toolkit)
- Programs should not require any candidate to make an in-person visit.
- If in-person visits are allowed by a program:
 - Any in-person visit should be at the request of the applicant.
 - Any in-person visit should be an *informational* visit (e.g., tour of facilities) rather than a *recruitment* visit. No attempt should be made to personally influence a candidate’s rank order list during these informational visits.
 - In-person visits could include very brief greetings with program personnel (e.g., program coordinator, program director and/or associate program director, current fellows) and a tour of clinics and hospital. However, in person-visits should not include formal interviews; one-on-one meetings with program faculty, program director, associate program director, fellows; or meals with fellows and/or faculty.
 - Visit related costs (travel, hotel, meals) should not be covered by the program.
- 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. A program should not keep track of applicant in-person visits.
- 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.
- For reasons of equity and transparency, and as supported by the overwhelming majority of program directors responding to APDEM’s survey, **APDEM strongly encourages that all programs explicitly advertise**—on program webpages and on ERAS (<https://services.aamc.org/eras/erasaccount/>) and FREIDA (www.aamc.org/gmetrack)—**their interview plans, including whether they will adopt 100% virtual interviews and whether they can/will accommodate in-person tours/visits upon request. If a program plans to accommodate in-person tours/visits, we also encourage that the program explicitly advertises the following:**
 - How in-person tours/visit invitations will be approached;
 - What in-person tours/visits will involve;
 - That any in-person tour/visit will not impact a resident’s candidacy; and
 - How the program will 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, which will be made available on the APDEM website.

Summary

APDEM Council, along with other graduate medical education stakeholders (e.g., the [Coalition for Physician Accountability](#) [which includes ACGME, AAMC, NRMP, etc.]), endorses **100% virtual interviews/visits** for the 2021 interview season. **We encourage all programs to 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.**

Sincerely,

APDEM Council