June 22, 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 (Appendix A). In late May, APDEM conducted a survey regarding 100% virtual interviews, and a clear majority (77%) of program director (PD) respondents[2] 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 respondents[3] 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 programs[4]**

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 recommends that *all* endocrine fellowship programs commit to 100% virtual interviews/visits for *all* applicants in the 2020 recruitment season.** However, given the survey responses described above, APDEM Council believes that some programs will still choose to accommodate in-person visits. **Therefore, APDEM Council suggests that ALL programs, including those can (and 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 (Appendix B).

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[1] Such an approach was endorsed for fellowship 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.

- 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 <u>require</u> any candidate to make an in-person visit of any sort.

- Programs should allow in-person <u>visits</u> <u>only</u> when requested by the candidate.

- If in-person <u>visits</u> are allowed by a program:

    o Any in-person <u>visit</u> 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.

    o 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.

    o We suggest that the program coordinator should conduct the visit and, thus, would be the only person to meet one-on-one with the visiting candidate.

    o Appropriate infection prevention strategies (e.g., physical distancing, use of masks) should be employed throughout any in-person visit.

    o In-person visits should occur on a business day, should not coincide with a visit by any other candidate, and should occur only on the campus of the program. Visit dates should be determined primarily by the candidate according to her/his availability.

    o 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 <u>visit</u> 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* <u>interview</u> 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 program webpages and, if possible, 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 visits. If a program plans to accommodate in-person visits, we also recommend that the program explicitly advertises the following:**

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[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.

- 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, 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 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.**

Sincerely,

APDEM Council

**APPENDIX A – pro-con arguments re 100% virtual interviews/visits and altered ERAS/NRMP timelines**

<mark>**Pros/cons: 100% <u>virtual interviews</u> for all programs and applicants for 2020 recruitment season**</mark>

**Advantages**

- Minimize infection risks to all (faculty, staff, trainees, applicants)
- Reduced financial burden for candidates and programs
- Reduced anxiety
  - **Applicants** desiring virtual interviews will not feel disadvantaged and/or pressured to accept in-person interviews
  - **Programs** desiring virtual interviews won't feel disadvantaged and/or obligated to offer in-person interviews
- Foster equity both for applicants and programs
  - Applicants will be unequally affected by travel restrictions and quarantine policies
  - Programs will be variably disadvantaged according to initial impact, timing of peak activity, second waves, and local/institutional restrictions

**Disadvantages**

- For applicants
  - Reduced ability to explore program culture and local environment
  - Potentially reduced ability to impress decision-makers in a desirable program[6]
- For programs
  - Reduced ability to assess certain aspects of candidates (e.g., interpersonal skills)
  - Potentially reduced ability to showcase training program and impress desirable candidates[1]
  - Determining the optimum number of virtual interviews given the likely increased number of applications per program[2]

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<mark>**Pros/cons: Altered NRMP timeline**</mark>

**Delayed ERAS opening date <span style="color:red">(note: this has already been decided by ERAS[7]):</span>**

**Advantages**

- Applicants disadvantaged by COVID-related disruptions (which could delay online application completion, letter of recommendation submission, acquisition of supplemental files) will have more time to complete their applications
- Programs will have more time for application review and more time to prepare for virtual interviews[8]

**Disadvantages**

- This could compress the interview season (if the Match date is not also delayed), which may make it more difficult to complete all desired interviews
- Overall impact is difficult to predict (e.g., if COVID activity increases in the fall, a delayed ERAS opening date could worsen applicants'/programs' ability to complete all desired interviews)

**Delayed NRMP Match date <span style="color:red">(note: based on a PD and fellow survey, APDEM did not petition the NRMP to delay their 2020 timeline):</span>**

**Advantages**

- If ERAS dates are not altered, a delayed Match date would render an expanded interview season: this could afford applicants more flexibility to pursue interviews, and it could afford fellowship programs more time to review applications and perform interviews
- More flexibility in the event that COVID activity increases in the fall

**Disadvantages**

- Delaying the Match until after Jan 1, 2021 will potentially delay onboarding of trainees with visa issues and/or in states with highly regulated medical licensing boards

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[6] Individuals may be favorably impressed/influenced by in-person interactions (vs. virtual interactions)
[7] Programs will gain access to applications on August 12, 2020.
[8] It is possible that programs may see more applications since virtual interviews will be easier and less expensive for applicants

**APPENDIX B – APDEM Toolkit for Conducting Virtual Interviews**

**YouTube Videos/Recorded Webinars**

https://youtu.be/yDMaYY9_r5g

> University of Arizona College of Medicine – Phoenix; 1-hour video – geared toward residency programs – but most applicable to fellowship PDs as well. Very nice review of their program for conducting virtual interviews and interview days.

https://www.aacom.org/aogme/webinars-professional-development/webinar-series/May2020

> American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine – 1-hour video geared towards residency programs, but with portions that are very much applicable to fellowship PDs and applicants.

**Websites**

https://www.aamc.org/what-we-do/mission-areas/medical-education/conducting-interviews-during-coronavirus-pandemic

> Very nice information from the AAMC – has information geared toward residents and residency programs, but applicable to fellowships. Multiple helpful PDFs with tips/recommendations/best practices. With information for applicants, PDs, and faculty that are interviewing virtually.

https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/best-practices-for-virtual-interviews

> Indeed.com is a website that helps employers find employees. This page details helpful information for conducting a virtual interview – would be helpful for PDs and faculty performing interviews.

https://www.aacom.org/docs/default-source/aogme-documents/recommendations-and-information-on-virtual-interviews.pdf?sfvrsn=fd010c97_4

> Recommendations and Information on Virtual Interviews from the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine – very nice PDF with information about virtual interviewing, that includes links to articles that are also helpful. Great resource.

https://thalamusgme.com/blog/

> Information from Thalamusgme.com – a GME interview management platform – blog posts include information about 'branding' your program, selecting video interview software, and tips for programs and for applicants.

https://blogs.jwatch.org/general-medicine/index.php/2020/05/virtual-residency-recruitment-in-the-time-of-covid/

> A guide to video interviewing with tips for both programs and applicants from a chief resident in IM, posted to the NEJM blog.

**Novel Ideas**

https://www.youvisit.com/tour/brown/

> Interesting website with a 'virtual tour' of Brown University.

*(Continued on next page)*

**Articles**

RE Jones and KR Abdelfattah. J Surg Educ. Virtual Interviews in the Era of COVID-19: A Primer for Applicants. 2020 Apr 8;S1931-7204(20)30086-6. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7142702/

A nice review written for the fellowship candidate – but with helpful information that program directors will find useful as well.

A Pourmand et al. Western J of Emer Med. Feasibility and Usability of Tele-Interview for Medical Residency Interview. 2018 Jan 19(1):80-86. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5785206/

A review of using web-based interviewing as opposed to in-person interviews for ER residency. Nice considerations and available data.


**Regarding unconscious bias**

APDEM's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee is working on gathering resources to minimize unconscious bias in the interview process and will share a toolkit prior to interview season. In the meantime:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-053AUVYPw8

In this brief (3 minute) video, Dr. Quinn Capers, IV, Associate Dean for The Ohio State University's College of Medicine Admissions, shares strategies to minimize implicit bias.


"What You Don't Know: The Science of Unconscious Bias and What To Do About It in the Search and Recruitment Process" – https://surveys.aamc.org/se.ashx?s=7C7E87CB561EC358

AAMC training for interviewers