

A Response to the Challenges of Virtual Interviews and Recruitment in the Era of COVID-19

Residency interviews are the most important component in both the process of choosing a training program for medical students and creating a cohesive class for training programs themselves. The interview day gives applicants a chance to meet the residents and faculty, see the facilities and housing, and create an overall perception of the program. The benefits of this activity are elucidated, and the challenges faced by programs secondary to the elimination of them in the era of COVID-19, are described in the article by Bernstein et al.¹ We offer an innovative way to complement their recommendations.

As a medium-sized program with a high faculty-to-trainee ratio, applicants would previously get to experience first-hand the camaraderie and positive culture of our program. Our interview season included an intimate evening of food and beverages with members of each of our residency classes, breakfast with an introduction to the program delivered by our program director, and a day of interviews and tours with a family-style lunch with members of the department. At the end of the day, the applicants were able to determine if they could see themselves fitting in with our department and culture prior to ranking our program. The COVID-19 pandemic has put an end to our ability to provide these in-person visits and face-to-face interactions.

Given the limitations brought about by the pandemic, we have had to confront the challenge of how to give the applicant an intimate experience in the sterile world of video interviewing and still impart the culture and values of our program. Prospective trainees will now have to depend on program literature, advice from friends and colleagues, and our reputation as described in blogs and chat rooms. Like many other programs, we produced videos to attempt to recreate the



FIGURE

Welcome Package of Curated Interview Materials

Note: Each package includes branded pen, notebook, ringlight, camera lens cover, and locally sourced cookie and coffee.

interview day experience: a tour through the halls, operating rooms, and lounges in the hospital as well as resident housing, all while attempting to acquaint applicants with our department's congenial spirit through the style of presentation.

To better capture the nature of our program, we curated a variety of materials to convey our best attributes. These items relevant to the interview process and our department location will be mailed to all candidates in preparation for their video interview. Given budgetary limitations, each item had to be both economical and purposeful; we targeted items that would ameliorate the potential challenges of a virtual interview and small tokens of the Manhattan experience (FIGURE). These niche items show that we are aware of the trends of our target demographic, understand an applicant's desire for a polished and professional interview, and offer a small taste of life in New York City.

Our interview day has undergone an enormous transformation. We will be utilizing Zoom to interview 12 candidates over 2 separate sessions each day, reserving the afternoon for those joining from western time zones. We will have residents in holding rooms to interact with candidates and will maneuver interviewees into breakout rooms to speak individually with faculty and our chief residents, all with the

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goal of offering a seamless virtual interview experience.

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References

1. Bernstein SA, Gu A, Chretien KC, Gold JA. Graduate medical education virtual interviews and recruitment in the era of COVID-19. *J Grad Med Educ*. 2020;12(5):557–560. doi:10.4300/JGME-D-20-00541.1.