

Lessons Learned on the Virtual Interview Trail

In the most important interviews of my life, the interviews that will determine where I will complete residency and grow to become the physician I dream to be, I wear my nicest shirt, tie, jacket, and sweatpants. This journey that my classmates, program directors, and I have been taking amid a global pandemic is completely unprecedented. Ashrafzadeh and Namburdiri's "Fostering Certainty in an Uncertain Era of Virtual Residency Interviews" intended to provide guidance to program directors as they navigate their virtual interview responsibilities.¹ As a current fourth-year medical student at the end of a mandated virtual interview trail² for the internal medicine residency match, I hope to provide perspective on how the authors' advice has manifested in my journey.

Creating and maintaining a comprehensive residency program website, capitalizing on using multimedia platforms, and organizing informal Q&A style get-togethers were 3 key suggestions the authors made.¹ In lieu of spending \$3,500 or more on travel-related interview expenses,³ I had only my laptop and smartphone to learn as much as I possibly could about each program I applied to. I'm thankful for the energy that program directors and residents have spent to satisfy the 3 recommendations. Many websites have been redesigned beautifully to include resident biographies, virtual tours, and videos of daily resident life. Resident-run Instagram pages took over my feed with images and videos of in-training physicians showing why they love their program. Zoom socials became the norm with meet and greets, trivia nights, and Q&A sessions that allowed applicants to ask difficult questions to residents in a safe environment.

While the ways that applicants must gain institutional information have changed, the nerves and stresses of entering an interview room, albeit a virtual "room," have not. Official resources exist giving students virtual interview tips,⁴ but the common denominator in my self-evaluated performance was experience virtually interviewing. The general structure of the interview day was similar across institutions. First, programs directors and residency leadership gave an introduction of their program by sharing a

presentation with the large group of applicants. Then, applicants were divided into smaller groups to rotate through several breakout rooms: Q&A sessions, video tours of the facilities, and individual interviews with program leadership. The majority of my interview time was spent discussing my career goals, my passion projects, and what I'm looking for in a residency program. The entire interview day took anywhere from 2 to 6 hours. Most importantly, the bathroom was always nearby, and nobody could see the sweat stains under my armpits!

Overall, Ashrafzadeh and Namburdiri's suggestions were respected by most residency programs I interacted with. Limitations to the virtual interview model include increased burden on program directors to accommodate a higher number of applicants⁵ and applicant inability to make a program visit until the first day of work as a resident. I do not believe that the limitations outweigh the benefits, however, and it is likely that residency programs will adopt hybrid interview models including in-person and virtual elements in the future.

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References

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