Videoconference Interviewing: Tips for Success

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The National Resident Matching Program (the "Match") was established in 1952 by medical students with the intent of establishing a predetermined date on which positions are made available to a pool of applicants.[1] In 2014, nearly 30 000 first and second postgraduate year positions were made available through the Match. For US medical school seniors, geographic location was the top-ranking factor (93%) in selecting a program.[2]

The residency interview process that precedes the completion of the Match ranking list is an expensive and elaborate endeavor. Application fees and travel and accommodation costs can add up quickly, and they usually are not covered by financial aid. In addition, residency programs have their own recruiting costs and spend considerable time in preparation, requiring faculty to spend time away from clinical duties. The use of videoconference interviews for residency and fellowship programs (in various medical or surgical disciplines) has been associated with positive feedback from candidates,[3,4] cost savings for candidates,[4–8] and increased time efficiency.[7,8] All of these support the incorporation of video technology into the interview process.

The internal medicine residency program directors at the Mayo Clinic in Arizona decided to follow in the footsteps of these pioneering programs and pilot our own videoconference interviews for the 2014 Match. Although videoconference interviewing is common in other settings, such as the business world,[9] staff in these residency programs did not have any prior expertise. Based only on our experience with such programs as Skype (Microsoft Corp), we implemented a video interview process and quickly learned that attention to small, seemingly simple, details made a marked difference in the quality of the interview.

We offered videoconference interviews to 12 candidates, and 8 accepted. Candidates were selected for the videoconference interview if (1) their application met our criteria for an in-person interview, and (2) they were unable to attend (typically due to scheduling constraints). During an in-person interview, a candidate meets individually with 2 faculty members for 30 minutes each and the program director for 15 minutes. For our videoconference interviews, each candidate was interviewed by a panel (the program director, the associate program director, and 2 chief residents) for a total of 30 minutes. An option was given for scheduling interviews on 1 of 3 half-days, which included at least 1 morning and 1 afternoon option to accommodate time zone differences. Ultimately, 2 to 3 candidates were interviewed on each half-day. The panel remained in the room for the entire 30-minute videoconference.

Before the videoconference, interviewers compiled a list of preferred questions. These draft questions were reviewed and consolidated to avoid duplication and ensure that the highest-impact questions were asked. Each interviewer on a panel asked 1 to 2 questions and 1 standardized question. This standardized question was part of our interview process for all candidates, including those who interviewed in person.

In the more successful interviews, candidates were dressed in attire appropriate for an on-site interview and positioned the camera directly at eye level. They appeared to maintain eye contact and seemed completely engaged throughout the interview. These candidates also appeared to have reviewed the online program information and were prepared with questions. In contrast, in a less successful interview, the applicant positioned the camera such that he was looking downward and swiveled nervously in a wheeled chair.

The clear benefit of video interviewing for a residency or fellowship program is the ability to engage and interview candidates who are not able to participate in an on-site interview due to time or resource constraints. We assured every candidate who participated in a videoconference interview that they would be considered equally in the ranking process. We met some excellent candidates in the process of video interviewing, and we ranked 2 of the 8 in a

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TABLE
Tips for Improving the Videoconference Interview

Phase	Suggestion	Comment
Before the interview	Ensure that the backdrop is neutral; angle the camera away from any doors or windows	Avoid distraction (from background, unexpected visitors)
	Notify friends, family, and coworkers about the videoconference interview; disconnect or silence the office or home telephone, cell phone, and pager; decrease the speaker volume on the computer	Reduce or eliminate interruptions and unnecessary background noise (eg, vacuuming, conversations, dog barking)
	Ensure appropriate lighting	Normal overhead lighting typically is sufficient
	Use an Ethernet connection	Ethernet connections are generally faster and more dependable than wireless connections[10]
During the interview	Close all unnecessary programs on the computer	Allow the computer to allocate maximal resources to the videoconference software; avoid distraction from messaging, pop-ups, etc
	Plug portable computers into a power source	Videoconferencing can quickly drain a laptop or tablet battery
	Verify that the profile picture displayed by the video software is appropriate	Also review photos on other social media sites
	Dress professionally	Wear what you would to an in-person interview
	Angle the camera slightly downward	This gives the effect of eye contact and a more engaging facial appearance
	Look into the camera when responding to questions to improve the perception of eye contact	This is a difficult habit to form and needs to be practiced ahead of the interview
	Avoid inadvertently watching yourself when speaking	Close the self-view window if necessary
	Sit still, lean forward, and keep hands still	Avoid chairs with wheels to eliminate swiveling or pivoting motions; hand motion is a natural sign of animation but can be distracting in a videoconference
	Notes are acceptable, but ensure that they are clearly visible	Paper-shuffling sounds can be loud in a videoconference environment
After the interview	If connection problems occur, inform the interviewer or interviewee early in the conversation	Suggestions to hang up and reconnect are acceptable
	Touch base with the interviewer or interviewee	Feedback is always helpful
	If the interview had technical difficulties, the interviewee can ask whether a protocol for a repeat interview is available	Options include interviewing by phone, videoconference, or in person

position to match. Ultimately, we did not match any of our video-interviewed candidates.

One drawback to video interviewing is that candidates do not get to see the campus on the day of the interview. Daram et al[3] reported that drawbacks to a fellowship interview by videoconference included a lack of interaction with fellows and faculty, as well as an inability to gain detailed knowledge about the city, the program, and the institution. To partially remedy this situation, we created a virtual tour of the campus that includes commentary by the chief residents. The candidates were given access to this video, as well as several electronic informational brochures to review before their interviews. Specific program information allowed a candidate to ask focused questions during the video interview. We also provided the candidates with resident contact information, so that they could ask additional questions directly to residents in our program. Still, our ability to convey the positive aspects of our program and institution likely were limited by the 30-minute interview format.

Our program leadership is still reviewing the experience with video-based interviews. We have learned a great deal through our initial experiences, and have summarized our videoconference interviewing tips for success (TABLE).

After the interviews, candidates were sent an anonymous electronic survey about their experience, and 6 responded with positive and valuable feedback. All candidates thought the electronic program materials were beneficial, with 4 indicating that the materials answered most of their questions. Suggestions included providing a resident-composed fre-

quently asked questions (FAQ) document, and more information regarding tracks and fellowship opportunities. Only 1 candidate thought the video quality was poor during the interview; the remaining candidates had no difficulties with the technology. Three respondents thought the 30-minute time frame was sufficient; the other 3 indicated they would have preferred a longer interview or more time for questions. A total of 5 candidates thought the interview was sufficient to allow them to make a ranking decision, and all 6 said they would consider ranking a program in which they participated only in a videoconference interview.

Overall, we had a positive experience because we met with eligible candidates who otherwise would not have been able to interview. Therefore, we plan to offer these interviews again and likely will increase the number of available appointments. Based on the feedback we received, we will keep our program's informational materials viewable over a longer period of time, create an FAQ document from our residents, enhance the video tour of our facilities, and include a tip sheet for video-based interviews.

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