Even with the expiration of the federally declared public health emergency, some COVID-era adaptations are here to stay. One such measure that has momentum to remain the norm is the practice of conducting many interviews virtually during the residency selection process.

In a 2022 National Resident Matching Program survey, 94% of responding program directors conducted all their interviews virtually and 4% conducted between 74%–99% of their interviews virtually.

That data—the most recent available—was obtained during the third year of the pandemic. More recent guidance from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) notes some advantages to continuing with virtual residency interviews.

The AAMC offered five key reasons for the recommendation.

**Virtual interviews slash costs**

A 2022 study conducted by the AAMC found that the median cost of for an applicant interviewing for residency in person was $3,000. Those costs include travel and transportation upon arrival, lodging, meals and incidentals.

Virtual interviews eliminate those costs, saving students money and creating more equitable opportunities for candidates with varying resources to pursue interviews. Last year, the AMA House of Delegates took actions to mitigate demographic and socioeconomic inequities in the residency and fellowship selection process.

The AMA Road to Residency series provides medical students, international medical graduates and others with guidance on preparing for residency application, acing your residency interview, putting together your rank-order list and more.

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/medical-students/preparing-residency/4-reasons-virtual-residency-interviews-might-be-here-stay

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Applicants prefer virtual interviews

The world has adapted to working environment in which video calls are normal. Medical students are no exception.

One study cited by the AAMC noted that the applicants found a virtual format comfortable and less stressful. That study’s results were based on a 2021 survey of medical students. The major disadvantage of virtual interviews cited by student respondents was that it limited their ability to explore the culture of the program face to face.

More time to focus on training

Time spent interviewing for residency positions is time that is not spent improving one’s clinical skills. Virtual interviews greatly reduce the time devoted to residency interviews.

The AAMC cited a 2017 study of plastic-surgery applicants showing those medical students missed an average of seven days’ training to attend interviews.

As applicants embark on the residency selection process, no online resource contains as much information as FREIDA™, the AMA’s comprehensive residency and fellowship database®, which includes more than 13,000 Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education-accredited residency programs, and offers a streamlined user experience.

The platform offers any user who has signed in the ability to personalize searches and nickname them so that search filters don’t need to be reapplied every time. AMA members also have the ability to take notes on programs, conduct side-by-side program comparisons, and use FREIDA’s Residency Calculator to help plan ahead for residency-application expenses.

Virtual interviews cut carbon footprint

The health professions are responsible for a disproportionate amount of the greenhouse-gas emissions in the U.S. According to a study cited by the AAMC, the median greenhouse-gas emissions savings from a single applicant’s conducting residency interviews virtually is greater than the annual combined emissions of more than 16 Americans.

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The bottom line

The AAMC recommendations come with the qualifier that programs are unique, and a one-size-fits-all approach isn’t practical for medical education.

Reasons a program might want to pursue an in-person-only interview format, according to AAMC guidance, include that those programs may have a large pool of local applicants and, on the other side of the coin, that a program may have a need to showcase, in person, a less well-known or rural area. To make those interviews less taxing, an institution may want to offer financial assistance to applicants, the AAMC guidance stated.