

New residents: Licensing, house hunts are among pandemic's challenges

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Obtaining copies of one's fingerprints is a routine exercise that typically takes about 15 minutes. It can be done close to home.

During a pandemic, however, even the routine can require an extraordinary effort.

That was the case for Elizabeth Southworth, MD, a few weeks back. A recent graduate of the Stritch School of Medicine at Loyola University Chicago, Dr. Southworth was working to get the necessary requirements for her resident training license. That included a set of fingerprints for a background check.

"I was trying to be a proactive resident, and I had to call about five police stations in the Chicagoland area to see if they were doing fingerprinting," said Dr. Southworth, who will begin her training in the ob-gyn residency program at Michigan Medicine in June. "Because of COVID-19, everyone suspended that service. [Another medical student] and I ended up driving to Michigan to get our fingerprints done. That was a stressful few days."

Both medical students and residents are being greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Those transitioning from medical school to residency are uniquely affected. In some instances, they have to go to extraordinary lengths for somewhat routine processes such as moving or obtaining aspects of their physician license.

Finding living arrangements

Sheyla Medina, MD, had plans to take a long road trip to the West Coast—following her graduation from the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University—prior to beginning her residency at the

University of California, San Francisco. That notion had to be altered due to the pandemic. Instead of spending two weeks sightseeing in a half dozen states, she made the drive from coast to coast in a matter of days and had to immediately start a difficult search for a new place to live. “I’m going out there a little earlier now,” Dr. Medina said. “I wanted to be in closer proximity to the city I’ll be working in and get a sense of what it’s like to live there during these strange times. I want to get to know what my routine would look like.”

Dr. Medina’s aim was to get west to find housing in San Francisco, one of the nation’s most expensive and competitive rental markets. As she searches for housing, Medina plans to stay with friends in the region.

“It’s a little bit more challenging connecting with people in general, especially with people who have a vacant room in San Francisco,” she said. “It’s such an expensive area. You aren’t going to have your usual meet-and-greet and tour of the apartment. Now it’s more of a process to make sure the people I’m meeting are safe and healthy, and vice versa.”

Virtual apartment hunting

Nina Gummadi, MD, is a recent graduate of Boston University School of Medicine who will be moving to the Midwest to train in the pediatrics program at the University of Chicago. She and her husband signed a lease on an apartment without seeing it in person.

“We reached out to bigger apartment buildings,” Dr. Gummadi said. “Everyone was doing virtual tours, which was nice. Some people had realtors go in and do a FaceTime call.

“The one thing that changed for us in terms of looking for an apartment: We decided to look in bigger, managed properties. That felt more reliable—we could go off more reviews online.”

Dr. Gummadi is staying with family in Atlanta before making the move. In a few weeks, she and her husband will pack a truck and move North.

But when they get there, they will need a hand.

“The other thing that has been more difficult is figuring out movers,” she said. “Not knowing when quarantine or lock down will end in various cities, it’s been hard to organize.” The AMA has curated a selection of resources to assist residents and medical students during the COVID-19 pandemic to help manage the shifting timelines, cancellations and adjustments to testing, rotations and other events.