Without travel, costs of residency interviews to decline sharply

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In-person residency interviews are unlikely to take place for applicants seeking residency positions as part of the 2021 cycle. Though the change is one of necessity brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, there are some student concerns about the reality that all interviews will be virtual.

Kareem Abdelfattah, MD, is the director of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center (UT Southwestern) general surgery program, which has been conducting residency interviews virtually since 2017.

“It’s just different when they haven’t been able to visit campus and look future colleagues in the eye,” Dr. Abdelfattah said during a recent AMA Innovations in Medical Education Webinar. “The amount of time spent walking trainees through these decisions has increased quite a bit for our program, and medical schools are going to have to consider how they are going to advise students on how to rank programs on the limited information they have.”

The lack of in-person interviews does present at least one silver lining: A savings on residency interview travel costs. The new FREIDA™ Residency Calculator is a member-exclusive tool that assists medical students in planning ahead for residency application costs and interview expenses. It also can account for the change in interview expenses during the unique 2021 application cycle.

Cost savings

The cost of applying to residency programs and interviewing has been a burden for many students over the years.

According to data compiled by the National Resident Match Program (NRMP) from the 2019 Main Residency Match, graduates of MD-granting medical schools located in the United States ("U.S.
seniors”) who matched attended a median of 13 in-person interviews. The number among graduates of osteopathic and foreign medical schools—was a bit lower, at nine.

The FREIDA Calculator shows that the amount spent on the application process without interviews for the average applicant is about $800 given the following assumptions:

- Application to 39 programs—the 2019 average for U.S. medical school seniors, according to the NRMP.
- Application to one specialty, which is most common.
- USMLE transcript, at a cost of $80.
- Match registration fee—at a cost of $85.
- Conducts all interviews virtually.

If this applicant then accounts for a single in-person interview with a flight, two days of rental car expenses and a night in a hotel, that number jumps to more than $1,500 on the entire process.

Travel expenses for that single interview total $750, meaning if an applicant traveled with the above criteria to 13 individual interviews—students tend to save where they can, so that’s unlikely—he or she would spend nearly $10,000 on transport and lodging.

**Diminishing returns**

The average number of applications and interviews is on the rise. For instance, between 2010 and 2019, the average number of applications submitted by medical students who want to match into obstetric-gynecology residency programs more than doubled, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC).

That’s a trend that may not yield desired results, according to John Andrews, MD, the AMA’s vice president for GME innovations.

“In the current environment with application numbers increasing it is increasing the burden on applicants without a corresponding increase in match rate,” said Dr. Andrews, who is spear-heading the AMA’s Reimagining Residency initiative.

“The AMA is concerned about the rising number of applications and the educational impact of missing time in school to complete a large number of interviews. We are working to support innovations that will reduce those pressures.”

In addition to the Calculator tool, FREIDA™, the AMA’s comprehensive residency and fellowship database, includes more than 12,000 Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education-accredited residency programs, and has a new look and feel that offers a streamlined user experience.

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/medical-students/preparing-residency/without-travel-costs-residency-interviews-decline-sharply

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experience. The AMA also has curated a selection of resources to assist residents, medical students and faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic to help manage the shifting timelines, cancellations and adjustments to testing, rotations and other events at this time.