

How medical schools offer admissions flexibility during pandemic

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An economic downturn amid a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic has been the likely reason for an increase in medical school applications. The unprecedented conditions, in spite of the uptick in application volume, have also led to medical schools offering more flexibility in the admissions process.

According to a recent survey of medical school admissions officers across North America conducted by Kaplan, 93% of respondents have made their admissions process more flexible due to the impact of the coronavirus crisis.

“This is not the application cycle that any aspiring doctor could have predicted or wanted when they took their first premed class as a freshman, but medical schools seem to be taking steps to make the process as straightforward as possible under extraordinary conditions,” said Petros Minasi, senior director of pre-health programs at Kaplan.

“Premeds should keep in mind, though, that although most medical schools are taking steps to remove roadblocks, that it won’t be any easier to get into medical school than in recent years,” Minasi said. “In fact, with applications surging, it’s more important than ever to put together the strongest application possible.”

What flexibility looks like

Over the past eight months of uncertainty and facility closures, major aspects of a medical school applicant’s portfolio—such as in-person volunteer experience and physician observation—have become more difficult to obtain.

“It’s the consensus with my colleagues across the spectrum of med schools that we’ve all come to an

understanding that this cycle is going to be limited in terms of expectations based upon what would be the normal volunteer activities,” John D. Schriener, PhD, told the AMA. He is associate dean for admissions and student affairs at Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine, one of 37 member schools of the AMA’s Accelerating Change in Medicine Consortium.

In addition to volunteer experience expectations, Kaplan’s survey revealed that medical schools are:

- | Accepting pass-fail grades for prerequisite courses.
- | Extending score submission deadlines for the Medical College Admission Test, which had been disrupted during key windows in the testing cycle.
- | Moving admission interviews online.

A less rigid approach to admissions could potentially provide stress relief to applicants who have been through a cycle riddled with tumult and uncertainty.

“Applicants hold a pre-pandemic vision from advisors and near-peers of what it takes to succeed in the admissions process,” said Kim Lomis, MD, the AMA’s vice president for undergraduate medical education innovations. “That is daunting, since many of the traditionally valued experiences and metrics have simply not been possible to attain this year. Hearing that schools are cognizant of these constraints and are being open-minded will hopefully reduce anxiety and let students focus on their enthusiasm for a career in medicine.”

Starting strong

Medicine can be a career that is both challenging and highly rewarding but figuring out a medical school’s prerequisites and navigating the application process can be a challenge into itself. The AMA premed glossary guide has the answers to frequently asked questions about medical school, the application process, the MCAT and more.

Have peace of mind and get everything you need to start med school off strong with the AMA.