

3 ways COVID-19 will affect 2022 medical school application cycle

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Of all medical school application cycles, the one that faces the incoming class of 2022 is likely to be the most disrupted by the pandemic.

Those applying in 2021 were at least part of the way through the process—having likely taken the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) and completed some of the requisite undergraduate coursework. Those applying in 2022 may not have been far enough down the road to undertake most aspects of an application portfolio before the pandemic interrupted the process.

This leaves the question most potential applicants are likely to ask: How will admissions offices view applications for the 2022 cycle?

“With COVID, there were a lot of limitations for so many applicants,” said Ngozi F. Anachebe, MD, associate dean for admissions and student affairs at Morehouse School of Medicine, one of the 37 member schools in the AMA Accelerating Change in Medical Education Consortium. “The information we are giving to aspiring medical students is not to worry about hard numbers with shadowing and volunteering, and regarding coursework that may have been taken pass-fail or science courses that may have been not taken.”

Here are three big ways the 2022 medical school application cycle will differ because of the pandemic.

Letters of recommendation

Letters of recommendation are an opportunity for an outside voice on your application—one that can speak to an applicant’s academic and personal strengths. In a typical application season, at least one letter would come from a faculty member or physician with whom a student has worked closely, the doctor likely through shadowing. COVID-19 has made it impossible for students to shadow physicians

and remote learning created a dynamic where cultivating a mentor-mentee relationship with a professor is cumbersome.

Medical school admissions officers are cognizant of those impediments, Dr. Anachebe said, and are willing to keep an open mind when viewing who is writing the letters. She suggested people with whom students have had long-term relationships—such as church leaders or high school teachers as potential letter writers in place of college professors—as those who could be effective letter writers.

Learn the top tips to help pre-meds get into medical school.

Different types of experiences

Volunteer hours are typically among the most heavily weighed factors in the medical school admissions process. Those experiences, particularly those in a clinic setting, were harder to come by over the past year and half.

That doesn't mean a medical school applicant didn't contribute in a meaningful way to their community. It could be that you contributed within your household or by helping a neighbor. Highlighting where you helped out and how it made somebody else's life better will resonate with admissions officers.

"We want them to demonstrate some type of service orientation and stand out in a positive manner," Dr. Anachebe said. "You can do a lot of things. It can be that parents were at work, and they had to care for their younger siblings. Caring for a family member shows service."

Moving past metrics

MCAT administrations were chaotic over the past year, and not every 2020 test-taker took the same version of the test—with a shortened format being offered to accommodate a hasty testing window. Further, the move from in-person to online learning could have an adverse impact on grades. Those realities could lead to a slight de-emphasis on GPA and MCAT scores as evaluation mechanisms.

Low MCAT scores shouldn't dissuade a potential medical student from applying. If you feel that you can represent your motivations for pursuing medicine in a positive fashion it only takes one school to make an applicant a medical student.

"If you aren't in the game, you'll never get a chance to live that dream," Dr. Anachebe said. "Schools are truly performing a holistic review. It's not just about what's your GPA and MCAT score, this year

especially.”

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.