

3 ways virtual medical research competitions benefit entrants

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For the second time in as many years, the AMA Research Challenge will be taking place virtually, rather than in person.

The event is the largest national, multispecialty research event for medical students, residents and fellows, and international medical graduates. It offers young and aspiring physicians a chance to showcase their research on a significant stage.

New this year, a grand prize of \$10,000, sponsored by Laurel Road, will be awarded to the winner of the 2021 AMA Research Challenge. The deadline for abstract submissions is July 27. That is to be followed by poster presentations, a semifinal in October and a final round of competition, in which entrants present to judges, in early December.

While there are some drawbacks to a virtual format, it also presents unique opportunities for entrants. In speaking to last year's finalists, here's a look at the reasons a virtual format helps competitors.

Better access

Aimen Vanood, a medical student at Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine, in Auburn Hills, Michigan, was one of the five finalists in the 2020 AMA Research Challenge, also done virtually.

Vanood said the virtual format can “create a more level playing field in terms of accessibility.”

“Meetings that I previously could never have attended due to cost and travel are now only a click away!” she said. “This has connected us all not only nationally, but internationally as well. The world of medicine is large and I think it is very special that physicians and scientists all over the world can participate in these meetings together.”

Fewer jitters to overcome

Public speaking requires, by definition, that one be in public. Considering that public speaking is one of the more common fears people hold, the virtual format can assuage that cause for trepidation, according to 2020 co-winner Victoria Danan.

“Having it be online was a huge help for me, as it eased me into public speaking,” said Danan, a medical student at Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine at Florida Atlantic University. “I spent a whole day doing multiple takes and practicing my presentation skills, watching it back, and improving on it. It was a great first learning experience.”

Chance to build new skills

While the world will likely return to in-person meetings in the near future, the idea that virtual presentation will completely fall by the wayside seems unfounded.

“I was definitely outside of my comfort zone with the recording, but looking back, I feel that it will be a good skill to have to share research as we move into a new normal which might include more digital conferences,” said Eli Levitt, a 2020 finalist and a medical student at Florida International University Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine.

Learn more about the winning projects from the 2020 AMA Research Challenge.