

Another year of virtual interviews: What pre-meds must know

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With COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths surging due to the highly contagious SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant, pre-meds should plan to continue the practice of conducting admissions interviews online during the 2021–2022 medical school application cycle.

For some, it will be the third interview cycle to take place at least partially online, and that has allowed for the process to be refined for the benefit of candidates and admissions officers.

“We started doing this at the end of the 2019–2020 cycle,” said John D. Schriener, PhD. He is associate dean for admissions and student affairs at Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine (OUH-COM).

“I tell candidates that we have been doing this long enough that we know everybody would like to be in-person so you can best present yourself,” he said. “We don’t feel that things are being compromised. We are still getting everything out of these interviews that we need to get the right people into our medical program.”

OU—one of 37 member schools of the AMA’s Accelerating Change in Medical Education Consortium—recently started conducting interviews for this application season. For those looking to know what to expect, Schriener offered his insight.

Visits may be possible

As is the case with the decision to have virtual rather than in-person interviews, the decision to do structured campus visits is being made on a per-program basis. OUH-COM is doing smaller visit days, of about 25-40 admitted students on each of our campuses in both the fall and spring seasons.

“It is all going to be done in a very safe, risk-mitigated fashion,” Schriener said. “We are looking to have accepted students come to the campus in a measured number. It’s an opportunity to meet with faculty

and staff, albeit socially distanced, and create some community. It's not required, but it's understandable if applicants want to tour the facility and get a feel for a school they are potentially attending for four years. Of course this programming may change if the surging pandemic dictates we discontinue on-campus visits."

The same interview do's and don'ts apply

Making sure you have the technical side of the equation in order is important as is having your selling points and questions top of mind.

"The candidates shouldn't let it intimidate them, they shouldn't feel as though a virtual interview is any less important" Schriener said. "It's just as impactful as it is in person. Put your best foot forward and make the most of it."

Get tips and tricks on virtual medical school admission interviews.

Competition will be robust

In the last cycle, OUH-COM set a school record for applications received, seeing an increase of 18% year over year. They aren't alone, applications were up across the board in what some were calling the "Fauci effect."

Only about 10% of OUH-COM's applicants last year were invited for interviews, according to Schriener. Knowing that being invited for a medical school interview is a relatively rare opportunity, he encourages interviewees to make the most of it.

"People still need to realize that it remains very competitive to get into medical school," Schriener said. "Last year, our incoming class had an average number of schools applied to [of] 9.5 schools. Students are still casting a wide net and they know that it is as competitive as ever getting into med school."