

## M4s: What should you expect in residency interviews this year

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With the SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant sending caseloads, hospitalizations and deaths surging again—especially in the least vaccinated areas—it appears that the 2021–2022 residency-selection cycle will look much like the one that preceded it. The most notable difference from a typical year, then, is that trends indicate that most physician residency interviews will take place virtually rather than in person.

“We met as a group and have been following what the trends are, and we are not going to deviate from our plans last year, which is almost all virtual interviews for applicants here,” said Jimmy Stewart, MD, a professor of medicine and pediatrics and associate dean for graduate medical education at University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC).

“From a 50,000-foot view, it’s going to be very much aligned with what we did last year from a program standpoint,” Dr. Stewart said. “One important thing is that our faculty members have gone through the process before. We’ve made some initial tweaks from that process and are approaching it with an understanding of what they would do a bit differently.”

For those still finalizing the list of programs to which they plan to apply, FREIDA™—the AMA’s comprehensive residency and fellowship database—captures more than 12,000 Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)-accredited residency and fellowship programs. One major benefit of FREIDA is that it includes a personalized search experience, with more than 35 filters that allow users to sort programs by location (either list or map view), program type, application information, demographics, benefits, osteopathic recognition, special tracks and more.

Here's a look at some of the key things residency applicants should know, with another year of virtual interviews on the horizon.

## More interview slots

When the 2020–2021 interview process went virtual, there were fears of interview hoarding by the top candidates. Data still doesn't indicate, one way or another, whether the average applicant participated in an atypical number of interviews. Match rates for 2021, however, were similar to those in pre-pandemic years. Regardless of how the remote interviewing process tilted the balance, the end results were largely the same.

One positive for applicants is that some residency programs opened more interview slots. At UMMC, Dr. Stewart said interview slots increased 10%–15%.

In Dr. Stewart's view, expanding the pool of interviewees gave UMMC the opportunity to attract a different group of interns.

"We did feel like, with some programs, that they were able to match people from geographic areas that were further away or had [applicants with] different experiences than in a usual year," said Dr. Stewart, a principal investigator on UMMC's project that is part of the AMA Reimagining Residency initiative.

## Experiencing culture

While the content of interviews is largely replicable in a virtual setting, the experience of visiting a school is not. Though it remains to be seen whether campus visits will be permitted at any point during this cycle, UMCC is planning for a world in which most applicants do not visit campus.

During the 2020–2021 cycle, UMCC's surgical residency programs hosted virtual second looks—taking place after virtual interviews—for applicants from racial and ethnic groups that are underrepresented in medicine. There is talk of expanding that offering to all applicants in 2021–2022.

Beyond that, UMCC worked to expose applicants to current residents in the programs in which they applied.

"Everybody understands that an in-person interview allows you to show people your program and experience all the different dynamics," Dr. Stewart said. "Virtually, it just doesn't give you quite the feel or information from an applicant that an in-person interview does.. During interviews, most of our programs give dedicated time for [an] applicant to meet with residents/fellows without anyone else in the room."

In addition to interviews, residency applicants can reach out with questions to program staff and look to channels like social media to glean information.