What residency applicants should know before interviews

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There’s a lot on the minds of fourth-year medical students as they prepare for residency interviews, which are largely going to take place virtually. In speaking with medical students, resident physicians and faculty over the years a few key topics have emerged that offer insight on how to prepare for residency interviews.

Here are some of the major themes, thoughts and tips about the interview process that will help medical students prepare.

Know what not to do

One red flag in the interview process: Being a box-checker. Simply saying you did something—and not explaining how it influenced your career path or fed your interests—makes it seem like you did it to simply check the box as an applicant. Learn about other red flags in the interview process.

Know what you’ll spend
The lack of in-person interviews does present at least one silver lining: A savings on residency interview travel costs. The FREIDA™ Residency Calculator is an AMA member-exclusive tool that helps medical students plan ahead for residency application costs and interview expenses. How much will you save, and what should you expect to spend on the rest of the application process?

**Ask the right questions**

As a physician, the questions you will ask of your patients will go a long way toward determining a diagnosis. As a medical student moving into the realm of practice, questions you ask during your residency interviews will be a vital part of determining which residency programs are the best fit.

**Practice for a virtual format**

You may have some idea what the line of questioning will be, but you still need to be ready for interviews. Ideally, that means finding colleagues and faculty members who can put you through mock interviews. Another key method of rehearsing for interviews is to record your mock interviews so you can assess your performance.

**Know what you are going to say about COVID-19**

The effects of an ongoing pandemic will be evident from the get-go. Interviewers are going to ask about the pandemic, how you handled the disruptions and how it shaped the way you envision your future in medicine.