Virtual residency-interview mixers are a thing. Make them count.

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Making the Rounds

Meet Your Match | Assessing program culture during virtual residency interviews

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The physician residency interview process is about finding fit on both sides of the equation. One key for residency applicants in determining their fit with the position, the institution and their potential peers has historically been a dinner that takes place the night before or after an interview.

With interviews becoming virtual, that type of event isn’t often done anymore over a meal. Still, most programs do host some sort of mixer or open house that includes current residents and applicants. A resident physician and residency program director offered some insight on these events and how to make them most beneficial as an applicant.

Get key information

Dominique Cosco, MD, directs the internal medicine residency program at Washington University (WashU) in St. Louis. Since the pandemic started, WashU has hosted virtual mixers on Zoom on a weekly basis during the interview window. Applicants can attend as many of them as they like.

“Being able to interact with future colleagues, to understand the culture and climate of a program by socializing with current residents and asking them questions about their experiences and their career goals is of value to students and they should be actively taking advantage of these opportunities,” Dr. Cosco said during an episode of the “AMA Making the Rounds” podcast’s “Meet Your Match” series on residency selection. Listen to the full episode on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or anywhere podcasts are available.

At WashU, one important part of the virtual social events is that faculty members are not permitted to attend. That has helped change some applicants’ perceptions of the events, converting them from occasions to perform to opportunities to gather useful information. While the events may not impact residency selection, applicants should still do some prep work.

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“It would be useful for a student to come prepared with questions that are meaningful to them,” Dr. Cosco said. “If they have certain priorities for residency, or if they have priorities for moving to a certain city, whether that is job opportunities for a significant other, or thinking about family and residency, talking with residents who do have families or children in residency can be really helpful.”

The AMA Road to Residency series helps medical students, international medicine graduates and others find their best residency match. Find articles and resources to help you ace your residency interview, put together your rank-order list, and more. The AMA is here to help you advance to the next step of your medical career.

Make your interactions count

Alison Schmidt, MD, is a first-year ob-gyn resident at Michigan Medicine. She found that her interactions with residents during the virtual events gave her a chance gain a better understanding of several facets of the transition to residency.

“Sometimes you would have those kind of rare moments with a resident where you could ask your questions without feeling kind of as nervous as you might on an interview day,” Dr. Schmidt said. “I really liked taking advantage of those social events to talk to the PGY-1s … and to ask them questions like: What were things that surprised you? Given that you interviewed virtually, what were things that were different for you than what you expected during the interview process?

“And so, you can kind of use those as an opportunity for some of those more casual questions,” she added.

Dr. Schmidt said it was helpful for her take notes throughout the interview process, including the social events. She also found the events, particularly those with faculty present, could offer insight into program dynamics.

“Paying a lot of attention to the way that residents interact with one another and the way that they interact with faculty, even over the Zoom setting, can be helpful,” she said.

Learn with the AMA about tips to help M4s manage the stresses of virtual residency interviews.