

## Surveying Family Medicine Residency Applicants to Improve Virtual Interviewing

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### To the Editor:

Personal interviews have widely been validated as a key process to select residents for almost all family medicine residency programs in the United States.<sup>1</sup> However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many programs have found it necessary to transition to virtual online interviewing. We attempted to evaluate the experiences of interviewees for Northwestern University's family medicine residency programs to investigate how the virtual online format influences applicants' overall interview experience.

The Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine Institutional Review Board approved our study (study number STU00208606). The experiences and opinions of all candidates who had completed a virtual interview for either the Lake Forest or Humboldt Park family medicine residency programs at the McGaw Medical Center of Northwestern University for the 2020-2021 application cycle were evaluated by anonymous, multiple-choice surveys that were distributed via email upon the completion of the applicant's interview day.

We analyzed a total of 119 surveys. Highlights of our results include a majority of candidates indicating that they greatly prefer interviewing with both the program director (84.4% of responses) and with a current resident (58.3%), while less so with the department chair (37.5%). Although many respondents stated that they experienced a reduced cost burden due to virtual interviewing (83.5%), a slight majority indicated they would prefer in-person interviews if given a choice (51.6%). Most candidates (90.6%) prefer Zoom as the video conference platform compared to other modalities.

Overall, our research demonstrated that we succeeded in providing an interviewing experience that closely aligned with our candidates' preferences. For example, all of our candidates had the opportunity to interview with both the program director and with a current resident. However, we built in a total of five interviews into our schedule, which is slightly higher than the preferred four interviews that most survey respondents considered as ideal. Limiting our interview day to a total of four interviews may help prevent interviewee burnout and fatigue, thus optimizing the quality of our interactions with our candidates. Although many respondents indicated that they experienced a reduced cost burden due to virtual interviewing (83.5%), a slight majority (51.6%) indicated that they would prefer in-person interviews if given a choice, which is consistent with the results obtained from other institutions found in the literature.<sup>2</sup>

Future directions include incorporating more questions that address what candidates prefer rather than what they experienced on their interview journey. For example, instead of asking how long candidates' average interview day lasted, we would instead ask what they consider as an ideal length for an interview day. This would more directly help us make modifications to our interview day to improve our applicants' overall

experience.

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