TSDA Virtual General Session
September 26, 2020

Zoom Q&A Transcript

TOPIC: Review of TSDA Recommendations on External Rotations and Statement on Student Research

Q: Would the programs be able to upload the standardized letter form to ERAS software?

A: Emergency Medicine has the longest track record with standardized letters. They've been able to navigate the process of embedding within ERAS. It was clunky initially, but got better over the years.

Q. Will such a form be made widely available to all programs?

A. Answered during live webinar.

Q. Do PDs send these letters out or do the candidates have access to them to give to faculty?

A. Answered during live webinar.

Q. How honest do you find assessments of technical ability in letters of recommendation?

A. I think you knew the answer to this already. It is challenging at best.

Q. Would you consider a plan to send the Standardized form to PDs so they can choose whether to use them?

A. That's a great idea. We should indeed do that.

Q. Is there a down side to using these standardized Letters of Recommendation?

A. Answered during live webinar.

Q. How is the TSDA going to disseminate the standardized Letters of Recommendation to the applicants and Letters of Recommendation writers?

A. There is currently a taskforce working on this and we keep the Program Directors updated. Thank you.

Q. Are students aware of these standardized Letters of Recommendations? Do THEY like it?

A. There is data on this that Rita Milewski can go into detail with you, please reach out to her. As she said they can also upload a full more routine Letter of Recommendation in addition to the standardized portion so it should be the same.

A. The students in other subspecialties are aware of these. I am not aware of their consideration of them.

Q. This likely is a charged question but I will ask it: we've learned a lot about inequities in access, background, etc. standardized letters won't address this issue but only seeks to level a playing field that arguably is already slanted. How can we identify URM candidates who are qualified by immeasurable standards, without being accused of applying affirmative action?

A. Great question. Levelling the playing field is only one step. Completely agree with your assessment: we need all types of efforts - multimodal approach to solving this issue.

A. Would also add that holistic review of applications — which also adds points for things like efforts in advancing diversity or community engagement, or even for the applicant's ethnicity or race — might help.

TOPIC: Best Practices for Showcasing Your Training Program in the COVID-19 Era

Q. Recently heard about some programs at our institution sending 'Welcome Packages' (i.e. gift baskets) to applicants. Curious about the panel's thoughts on this.

A. Answered during live webinar.

Comment: I don't think our institution would approve.

Comment: This is a slippery slope. I think we need to be cautious here.

Comment: Offering "gifts" are incentives. It can lead to some nefarious processes.

Comment: My University forbids the sending of presents to applicants.

Comment: And local GME offices will have their own policies. Would encourage all programs to discuss with their DIO or GME office before sending out gift cards etc.

Q. YES review BUT also what does ACGME say?

A. The ACGME does not involve itself in the interview and selection process as that occurs outside of the training program which is the focus of their requirements and work.

Q. Does the TSDA or GME have an official policy on this?

A. Answered during live webinar.

TOPIC: Tips for Conducting Virtual Interviews

Q. Did anyone record interviews?

A. We did not at BIDMC.

Comment: I wonder if knowing your interview is being recorded would impact their attitude…feel suspicious or try to alter their behavior.

Comment: We did not record on the one day we completed virtual interviews for our independent program.

Comment: You would need two party consent in many states.

Comment: Many institutions prohibit recording interviews. Our institution just sent a letter detailing this.

Comment: Great point. I am sure this and state laws as Dr. Perez-Tamayo mentioned may impact this process.

Comment: Outstanding point.

Comment: Our institution and at least few other I know of are banning recording by the program or the applicants and even asking the applicants to agree to not record.

Comment: The question works both ways, potentially, for the interviewee and the program.

Comment: Our institution prohibits recording of virtual clinical and business sessions.

Comment: Our legal counsel says there can be no recording unless both sides are recording together.

Q. Is there a need to have multiple rooms? Doesn't the virtual format allow everyone to eval the applicant at the same time? Listen to the same answer so that everyone can eval the same data. Just have a bit longer interview session and have someone "running" the interview to keep order.

A. Yes - the virtual format allows for flexibility. Do the one that the program is most comfortable with.

A. You can do one room and have everyone listen. As an applicant i might find that a bit intimidating but it certainly is an option. It would be a long interview day to be sure...We have liked having breakout rooms and a "lobby" where the applicants wait for their interview. Our fellows are also in the "lobby" so they can continue having a discussion with the fellows between their interviews with the faculty.

Q. Our second interview room consisted of Zoom interaction with our current residents. Recommendations on structuring this or keeping their dialogue free-form?

A. Access to your residents is a great idea. This access should ideally be free of faculty (applicants able to connect directly with trainees). We've found free-form to be more useful in this room, as the remainder of their day is structured.

Comment: Explore the economic savings for the residents.

Comment: Indeed. Will be interesting which aspects we retain after the pandemic is over.

Comment: Great point. I remember Mark [Iannettoni] speaking about the economic impact on our applicants years ago when he was the TSDA President but there was little traction on addressing it then. Now, with this crisis, we are being "forced" to implement an option that will accomplish that goal that was raised so many years ago.

Comment: Appreciate the TSDA's efforts in formulating guiding principles for trainee recruitment in the current era. It may be of interest to evaluate any change in "internal" candidate retention/selection in the next year or two.

Reply: That's a fantastic point. Many of us are worried that this process may unintentionally favor those applicants who are in privileged positions - training at programs for example that are larger, at traditional superpowers as compared to others. We as a whole need to ensure that the process is fair, and that programs do their best to recruit the best and brightest across the board. Work in progress, and as you've outlined, something we need to keep a very close eye on throughout the process.

Rely: Excellent point—hopefully we will be able to use innovation in virtual interactions to enable people to really get to know each other well enough. This will be interesting to explore, and my suspicion is that those programs who do less virtual interactions will be more likely to feel that they know their internal candidates better.

Comment: Definitely are some research questions that should be explored so we can learn from this process.

Q. For programs that have used Zoom break out rooms, do you set a "hard" time limit that automatically shuts off the interview after a predetermined time? Or, do you allow your faculty to continue their interview at their own speed and allow them to return to the main room afterward?

A. We have expected them to stop at the time clock just like we did with the live interviews.

A. Time limits. Otherwise it becomes chaotic and difficult to manage.

Q. What is the optimal number of applicants to interview virtually?

A. As many as your faculty wish to do. We've so far maintained the same number we would interview in person. Over the past three years, we've interviewed 30 to 35 applicants (we get around 100 applications each year, which is the vast majority of those registered in the Match).

A. 30 to 35 total over three days.

Q. Have any of the programs been grouping applicants from different time zones to make it easier for the applicants and avoid fatigue, etc. due to the time zone differences?

A. Answered during live webinar.

A. We haven't yet, but that's an interesting idea.

Comment: I was just making a note about trying to do that.

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