

**TSDA Recommendations on Visiting External Medical Student Rotations During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Visiting external rotations for medical students to Cardiothoracic Programs have been previously available to applicants for a variety of reasons.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in severe restrictions to travel and congregation. Currently, most if not all institutions and Programs have cancelled visiting rotations of any kind both for the safety of the institution as well as of the student, but most importantly of the patients. This is a time of fluidity and uncertainty. Balancing the need for safety, education, and equity for students, institutions, patients, and communities, is paramount.

External rotations can require a financial expenditure for students due to the required travel and housing. This may create inequity between students of differing backgrounds. Additionally, different areas of the country have been affected by COVID-19 to varying degrees. It is possible some regions of the country may allow more usual processes and allow visiting students while others would not. This may lead to further inequity and disadvantage for students and Programs who are not able to participate in visiting rotations. Lastly, it must be stressed that the participation in a visiting rotation does not guarantee admission to a particular Program and, in some instances, may reduce the likelihood of matching there.

In order to minimize the impact of the pandemic, reduce financial burden, and ensure the most equitable opportunities for all students and Programs during this COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the TSDA has taken into consideration the recent “*Coalition for Physician Accountability’s Work Group on Medical Students in the Class of 2021 Moving Across Institutions for Post Graduate Training*” guidelines posted on the AAMC website as well as the guidelines of other medical specialties. For all Cardiothoracic Residency Programs for the 2020-2021 academic year the TSDA suggests:

- At this time, all visiting medical student rotations be discouraged in the 2020-2021 academic year. This may be revisited and modified as the current pandemic situation changes. Students may enhance their Cardiothoracic experience at their home institution.
- In the unique situation that a student’s home institution does not have an active Cardiothoracic Surgery Program, a student may possibly gain experience in Cardiothoracic Surgery at the closest ACGME accredited Program, if that

Program allows, in order to minimize travel and keep within regional disease demographics.

- At this time, to ensure equal opportunity for all applicants, in light of the external student rotation limitations, the TSDA encourages all Program Directors:
  - To give Letters of Recommendation from non-Cardiothoracic Surgeons greater weight than might customarily be afforded compared to Letters from Cardiothoracic Surgeons
  - When requesting Letters of Recommendation, the Program should request that the period of time the surgeon worked with the student applicant be included
- The TSDA encourages Programs to transition to online interviews and virtual visits for all applicants, including local students, rather than in-person interviews for the entire 2020-2021 cycle. The TSDA encourages Programs to develop and utilize Residency Recommendation Forms to be sent to the applicant's home institution to supplement and ascertain more detailed information about the applicant.
- Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, visiting clerkship programs for students underrepresented in medicine are also canceled. The TSDA recognizes that this could have an adverse impact on diversity and inclusion efforts, specifically in the context of recruitment. The TSDA implores Programs to be aware of this challenge, keeping diversity, inclusion and implicit bias mitigation in their peri-pandemic recruitment efforts and strategies.

The TSDA encourages Programs to offer opportunities to external students to engage in virtual student participation in a structured manner (1-2 months in lieu of an external rotation at that Program) and virtually join in their conferences, journal clubs, and any non-HIPPA restricted resident meetings and didactics. This participation would be mutually beneficial to allow the applicants to demonstrate their interest in the Program and allow the Program to interact with the student and showcase their residents and Program highlights.

In addition, in lieu of medical students rotating from external Programs, the TSDA recommends that Programs develop innovative alternative methods of disseminating information about their Programs and residents such as virtual tours and expanded websites to highlight attractive and unique aspects of the Program with specific emphasis on the Mission, Vision and Aims of the Program.