

American Society of Anesthesiologists Letter regarding Medical Student Externships and the Match Process during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, medical students entering next year's match to seek an Anesthesiology residency will be faced with many unforeseen challenges. These include, but are not limited to difficulties in scheduling away rotations (externships), hardship in obtaining letters of recommendation (LORs) for their residency match applications, and numerous obstacles to travel for residency interviews. The purpose of this letter is to show support for medical students and provide input to medical schools and residency programs during this process.

### Externships

Externships have been vital rotations for many medical students. Numerous medical schools may not have dedicated Anesthesiology rotations for their students or have a limited amount of exposure to Anesthesiology. Therefore, students have traditionally relied on externships to obtain anesthesia experiences at outside institutions. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic many students will not have this opportunity. Many medical schools are not allowing their students to go on any externships. For schools that allow students to travel for externships, their students are finding that many institutions will not offer externships for the upcoming year. These factors will create a significant impact on the ability for students to go to externships. Therefore, residency programs should not interpret the lack of externships in a student's application as a lack of interest in their program or in the field of Anesthesiology.

### Difficulty obtaining LORs

As the COVID-19 pandemic took form in the United States, many clinical experiences for students in their third year were put on hold. Reasons included decreasing hospital foot traffic and size of clinical teams, and preserving personal protective equipment (PPE). The decrease in exposure for students to patients and clinical faculty, along with lack of upcoming externships, will cause many students to find themselves having difficulty obtaining LORs from anesthesiologists. We ask medical schools to assist their students who are pursuing a career in Anesthesiology to find rotations where they will be exposed to the field and be able to obtain LORs. Secondly, we suggest Anesthesiology residency programs to remove any firm requirements for LORs specifically from anesthesiologists. Strong LORs reflecting an applicant's character, scholarship, and work ethic can be created by a physician from any field who has worked closely with the applicant.

### Interview Season

The details of the upcoming residency interview season currently remain unknown as the national effects of COVID-19 are still in flux and the possibility of future waves of spread remains a concern. Schools may be prohibiting or limiting student travel for interviews at no fault of the students. Secondly, students may be impacted by the financial downturn and not have access to resources to spend on extensive travel during the interview season. Thirdly, students and schools may be apprehensive of being exposed to a significant amount of air

travel where they may be at an increased risk for COVID-19 exposure and potentially returning to school as a carrier. Lastly, medical students may have to complete clinical time that was lost during the spring and their access to interview travel time may be greatly limited. For all these reasons, we strongly urge every residency program to make virtual interviews readily available for all applicants. Further, applicants should be reassured that virtual interviews will in no way have a negative impact upon their ranking. In addition, due to limitations in scheduling standardized exams, residency programs should not penalize applicants if they have not been able to produce a USMLE score.

#### Medical Student Performance Evaluation

MSPE's should reflect any limitations which the school placed on students in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These may include, but are not limited to, Pass/Fail grades, postponed shelf exams, incompletes grades on transcript, and lack of exposure to clinical rotations.

#### Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered every aspect of our usual routines and expectations. The ASA strongly supports our medical students during this unconventional time and acknowledges the tough decisions being made by schools and residency programs alike. We are confident that at the end of the match process, each student will find the right program that will shape them into the anesthesiologist of tomorrow.