



Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, medical students entering the 2020-2021 match for Anesthesiology residency training will be faced with many unique challenges. These include, but are not limited to, difficulties scheduling away rotations (externships), hardship in obtaining letters of recommendation (LORs), delayed USMLE step 2 examination scores, and numerous obstacles to travel for residency interviews. The purpose of this letter is to provide guidance for anesthesiology residency programs in demonstrating support for medical students due to these challenges.

The ASA, in collaboration with the Society of Academic Associations of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine (SAAAPM) and Association of Anesthesiology Core Program Directors (AACPD), support the guidelines published by the Coalition for Physician Accountability regarding the 2020-2021 recruitment season and COVID-19 (<https://www.aamc.org/what-we-do/mission-areas/medical-education/away-rotations-interviews-2020-21-residency-cycle>). As such, we make the following recommendations for anesthesiology applicants for the 2020-2021 recruitment season:

- 1) **Away Rotations for Medical Students:**
 - a. Away rotations are discouraged, with the exception of students who do not have access to clinical experience in a residency program in anesthesiology at their home school.
 - b. 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.
- 2) **Letters of Recommendation:**
 - a. Residency programs should be flexible in the number of anesthesiology-specific LORs required.
 - b. 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.
- 3) **Dean's Letters (MSPE):**
 - a. Dean's letters 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.
- 4) **USMLE/COMLEX Examinations:**
 - a. Due to restrictions placed on testing centers, many students will not be able to take USMLE/COMLEX Step 2 examinations prior to submitting an application for anesthesiology residency.
 - b. Residency programs should not require Step 2 examinations prior to offering interviews during the 2020-2021 recruitment season.
- 5) **Virtual Interviews:**
 - a. We recommend that all anesthesiology residency programs commit to online interviews and virtual visits for all applicants, including local students for the entire recruitment season.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered every aspect of our usual routines and expectations. The ASA, SAAAPM and AACPD strongly support our medical students during this unconventional time and acknowledge the challenges faced by medical schools and residency programs. We are confident that at the conclusion of the 2021 match, each student will find the right program that will shape them into the anesthesiologist of tomorrow.