

Dermatology Residency Program Director Consensus Statement on Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the 2020-2021 Application Cycle

*April 9, 2020*

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions to medical education across the country. We understand that students' anxiety about the upcoming application cycle has been heightened given the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19 related changes to curriculum and scheduling and how this will affect the residency application process.

As dermatology residency program directors, we would like to address principal areas of the residency application to hopefully lessen students' concerns regarding the process. These recommendations may change as the situation evolves; please continue to monitor AAMC and institutional policies and guidelines. Additionally, this statement represents the views of a group of dermatology residency program directors, but was not reviewed by all programs; please continue to refer to individual program websites for institution-specific information.

- **Research:** We understand that projects have been halted or delayed secondary to the COVID-19 pandemic, and will note students' prior and ongoing participation in research and academic projects in this context. Efforts that students have put forth in these areas are valuable, irrespective of whether they culminated in published work.
- **Volunteer/service/other experiences:** Many opportunities to serve in traditional areas for medical school volunteer experiences have been altered or made impossible by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional opportunities associated with changes in institutional practices related to COVID-19 may be available at some institutions but not at others. Prior and current volunteer experiences will be reviewed in this context.
- **Away rotations:** There is still uncertainty with regards to away rotation availability at many institutions; some institutions may be unable to offer away rotations this year at all, while others may be offering limited spots later in the summer or fall. Many students may be unable to participate in away rotations because of institutional travel restrictions. While away rotations can be helpful for certain students, particularly for those without "home" dermatology programs, or for those with family obligations in other locations, away rotations should not be perceived as required or necessary for matching into dermatology residency. If you have a specific interest in any programs, please visit those programs' websites to determine whether there are updates to their processes for this year, recognizing that institutional policies are constantly evolving.
- **Research year:** In recent years, more students have been choosing to pursue a "year off" in research prior to entering into the dermatology application process. While there are reasons for students to pursue such an option, such as potential interest in clinical or basic research, these experiences should not be perceived as required or necessary for matching into dermatology residency. If you were planning on pursuing such an opportunity prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, then it would make sense to continue

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those plans. However, there is no reason to choose this path simply because of COVID-19 pandemic-related changes to your application.

- **USMLE Step 2:** Some students may have planned to take the USMLE Step 2 exam but may be unable due to lack of availability of testing centers. USMLE scores are only a minor component of one's application, and students should not consider alternative application plans due to the absence of this score alone. Please refer to individual program websites to determine whether Step 1 score cut-offs are used and/or whether Step 2 scores are recommended/required.

As dermatology residency program directors, we recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic will result in increased disparities in strength of applications due to lack of opportunity for students with smaller home programs or in areas more affected by this crisis, particularly as some students may additionally be struggling with personal or family COVID-19 illness during this time. Understandably, this will lead to a considerable amount of added uncertainty and anxiety for many students as they consider future career plans. We support holistic review processes and encourage residency programs to consider and weigh these significant factors.

In this time of great personal and professional stress, we hope that by addressing specific concerns, students will feel more comfortable approaching the process and maintaining their application plans, knowing that we will take into consideration the multitude of extrinsic factors affecting applications this year.