



AAIM Guidance on Non-Interview Day Programming and Signaling Apps: Special Considerations in the Virtual Residency Interview Season

As a result of the pandemic and the switch to virtual interview formats we anticipate new challenges and considerations. AAIM and other organizations have provided resources for residency applicants, student advisors, and program directors, but this document draws attention to two recently identified considerations: non-interview day (or “asynchronous”) programming and commercial signaling apps.

Applicants will be eager for supplemental information and experiences to compensate for the lack of socializing, informal interactions with current trainees, on-site campus visits, and in-person interviews. Program directors will have to balance time constraints of their faculty and residents, patient care responsibilities, and the desire to spend time with applicants given the potentially impersonal feeling of virtual interview days. The virtual interview day will be a new experience for most program directors and applicants, alike, and as such, interview days may look very different from each other at different programs based on their own constraints, needs and experience.

Non-Interview Day Programming

In addition to virtual interviews, AAIM anticipates program directors may offer individual or group meetings with trainees, live or recorded video tours, program overviews, and/or educational conference displays. In an effort to ensure flexible access to information, programs may deliver pre-recorded content (available anytime); interview day events, such as interviews, grand rounds, morning rounds, teaching rounds, pre-recorded presentations from program directors, residents, or teachers, that occur on the interview day (including an evening before or after the interview day); and non-interview day events, which are scheduled on days other than the interview day.

Considerations

- If programs spread interviews for an applicant over more than one day, scheduling challenges for applicants could be magnified. Benefits to faculty interviewers and the program should be weighed against the impact on applicant experience and perception.
- While the scheduled non-interview day content could be valuable for applicants to get a better sense of program fit and culture, it may create burden for applicants. Applicants may find it challenging to manage and may have a perceived expectation that they participate in additional scheduled and nonscheduled activities on non-interview days across multiple different programs.
- Applicants may have concerns that they will be assessed by their degree of participation in non-interview day offerings, even to the point of motivating redundant participation at the same program. Hours spent in interview day plus non-interview day applicant activities is time not spent on clinical/educational activities, which may degrade the value of MS4 rotations and course work.
- Traditional interview season events that occur outside the interview day (e.g., social events the night before or the night after) do not pose new concerns this season.
- Other scheduled non-interview day offerings would be at each program’s discretion, but tracking of applicant participation at such events is discouraged given applicant competing demands.

Suggestions for Programs that Offer Non-Interview Day Programming

- Carefully weigh the pros and cons of offering non-interview day activities to applicants.
- Clearly state if non-interview day activities are optional, only for the benefit of the applicant, and participation will not be used in the assessment of applicants. Conversely, clearly state if non-interview day activities are considered part of the assessment of applicants.
- Consider offering a recording of non-interview day offerings when appropriate (educational conferences, overview talks). This eliminates the need for applicants to fit a schedule. These recordings could also be valuable as reminders when making decisions about rank lists.
- Consider offering multiple time slots of optional scheduled non-interview day offerings when recording would not be appropriate (informal resident conversations and socializing, question and answer panels), providing more options from which to choose.

Commercial Signaling Apps

Virtual interviews and uncertainties may encourage applicants to apply to more than the usual number of programs (worsened application inflation) making it challenging to distinguish deep from cursory interest in our programs. Signaling apps, primarily the commercial organization signaltokens.org, allow applicants to signal to training programs their particular interest in a particular program. While it is being widely marketed to applicants on social media, this app has not been officially endorsed by any program director association, ERAS, or AAMC. This season, inconsistent student participation will only further confound any potential usefulness of signaling apps. Without studies on effectiveness, acceptability, and applicant use of these apps, AAIM discourages use this season. Pediatric program director organizations are formally discouraging program participation.

In contrast, otolaryngology (ENT) programs are working on an interest preference signaling pilot in collaboration with stakeholder organizations (e.g., OPDA, AADO, SUO, ERAS, NRMP, AAMC) that would be free to use. Lessons from their experience may be valuable in future application seasons.

Recommendations

- Participation in commercial signaling apps this season is discouraged.
- Await results of signaling pilot from ENT prior to considering implementation of a signaling system.