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**AOA/CORD Recommended Guidelines for Virtual Recruitment of U.S. Orthopaedic Residents
During the COVID-19 Pandemic
June 29, 2020**

VIRTUAL EXPERIENCES

Virtual experiences for fourth year medical students provide a unique opportunity for both residency programs and medical students in the upcoming application cycle. With the restriction of externships, recruitment efforts will require a different approach. The AOA Council of Orthopaedic Residency Directors (CORD) defines virtual experiences as any interaction with students through virtual platforms designed to allow students to learn more about a program and vice versa during the fourth year of medical school prior to extension of interview invitations. Virtual experiences may take one of two forms:

1. Open invitation or “Open House” format: The open invitation format is an invitation for medical students to participate in scheduled conferences and information sessions to help them learn more about a program. These opportunities are loosely scheduled and students can attend at their own convenience. Open house opportunities may be a single interaction or may allow for multiple interactions over a period of time. Attendance is not required. No school credit is available for this opportunity.
2. Formal virtual program experience: A more formal, focused experience may also be offered to students that allows conference attendance and engagement in specific virtual meetings that introduce an applicant to a program. These experiences are scheduled and attendance by the student to scheduled sessions is expected or mandatory when they sign up. While this does not replace the in-person externship experience, this type of virtual experience is designed not only to introduce the program to a student but also introduce the student to the program. Components of this experience include small-group discussions, mentorship meetings and student case or topic presentations.

Recommendations

- Formal virtual program experiences and open invitation programs will vary by residency depending on a program’s needs.
- The length of a virtual experience should take into consideration the schedule and availability of fourth-year students.
- Four-week programs that attempt to mimic a clinical rotation are discouraged. Many students will not have adequate time to participate in these opportunities, and it is unlikely medical schools will offer credit for these experiences.

- Virtual interactions that extend over several weeks should allow ease of scheduling for students, and students should not be expected or pressured to miss clinical experiences at their home institution in favor of a virtual interaction.
- Open house experiences lend themselves to a longer timeframe and are student-schedule friendly. Formal virtual program experiences should be shorter than a typical extern rotation and flexible with student schedules to allow for adequate participation.
- Regardless of the virtual experience, patient privacy should be respected, and HIPAA regulations should be followed.
- Students are recommended to participate in formal virtual program experiences with no more than 4 programs.

The AOA CORD recognizes the challenges of the upcoming season and the need for virtual interaction. However, emphasis for students should be placed on high quality rotations at their home program or at an appropriate local program if they do not have a home program. These recommendations are in accordance with the AOA/CORD guidelines on student rotations, for students to achieve the maximum benefit of in-person experiences and evaluations.

Goals of rotations at home institutions should include:

- Introduction to orthopaedic knowledge
- Skills training
- Mentorship

Mentorship and support of students is critical this year. Online programs (e.g. OrthoAccess) to teach basic orthopaedic knowledge and skills can be a helpful supplement to the fourth-year medical student education.

Previously, traditional away rotations were either closely associated with or indelibly tied to conferring applicant interviews. However, a discrete link between participating in virtual experience and obtaining an interview may encourage applicants to over-engage in virtual rotations at the expense of the formal (i.e. in-person) educational process. While programs may reasonably interpret an applicant's participation in a virtual rotation as a demonstration of interest, AOA/CORD discourages the use of virtual experiences as an audition or precursor for an interview.