

July 6, 2023

Dear American College of Cardiology Program Directors,

The American College of Cardiology Program Directors and Graduate Medical Educators (ACC PD&GME) Leadership Council represents a diverse group of fellowship training programs across the nation in practice settings ranging from rural to urban, community to academic, and everywhere in between. Over the past several years, members of our specialty society have discussed and debated best practices in recruitment. The initial shift to only virtual interviews in 2020 was done out of necessity for safety and institutional mandates limiting travel due to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic. As these restrictions have been lifted and the federal Public Health Emergency (PHE) for COVID-19 has ended, the time to reconsider best practices for interview format is at hand.

Current recommendations of national organizations, including the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine (AAIM), and the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP), advocate for virtual interview formats as a means to reduce costs (and therefore possibly improve equity) and limit environmental impact. They cite residency studies that demonstrate certain positive experiences with the virtual interview format among applicants. However, these organizations recognize that training programs have unique needs, missions, and values that may inform their preference of interview format and also acknowledge certain benefits to in-person interactions. Similarly, we acknowledge that, unlike early in the pandemic, there is a variation of opinion among Cardiology Program Directors (PD) regarding these recommendations as well.

We believe that our highest priority regarding the ideal interview format should focus on benefits to the applicants, as they make this critical decision in selecting a training program. These benefits are not limited to just the recruitment season itself, but most importantly manifest as the individual goes through their training years. Having the right information and making the right decisions are of utmost importance to both trainees and programs. Despite several potential benefits to a virtual interview format, there is limited data to support which format applicants feel provides the best opportunity to make this decision. To address this question, the ACC Fellows-in-Training (FIT) Council, with support from PDGME leadership, surveyed Cardiology fellowship trainees who experienced both in-person and virtual interviews to gain understanding into preferences. The published results of this survey are forthcoming and will help further enhance this discussion and help inform our community.

As physicians dedicated to making evidence-based decisions for our patients, we recognize that evidence for the best interview format during Cardiology fellowship recruitment is just emerging. While institutional graduate medical education (GME) may guide individual program choice, programs may have the option to decide best practices. The AAMC and NRMP have recommended continuing with virtual interviews for the 2023-24 recruitment season. All-virtual interviews can create a level-playing

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field and uniformity in the process for applicants. While many Cardiology fellowships feel the recommendation from AAMC and NRMP to continue only virtual interviews is the best way forward, we must acknowledge that there is variation of opinion on this matter and a concern that this approach may not provide applicants with a complete picture of the training experience and negatively impact the decision-making process. The ACC PDGME Council supports the ability for programs to select an interview format that best aligns with their program's mission and values.

We call on national accrediting bodies such as the AAMC, NRMP, and AAIM to engage more vigorously with the GME community to explore all options. Without more robust discussion and comprehensive data, it is unclear at this time that a recommendation for indefinite virtual recruitment is the correct approach. The ACC PDGME Council remains dedicated to build on the lessons learned from diverse PD and applicant experiences and participate in ongoing discussions about the best recruitment environment and practices to benefit Cardiology fellowship candidates and programs now and in the future.

Sincerely,



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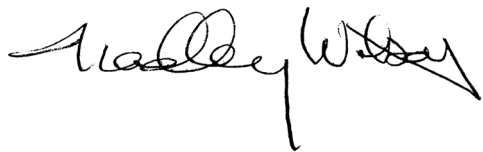
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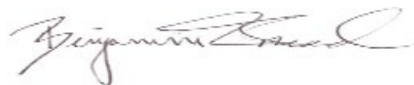
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