Perspectives of Medical Student Interviewers Conducting Online Interviews During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Dear Editor,

We were excited to read Goldwag, Panitz and Pinto-Powell's article discussing the involvement of medical students as interviewers within the medical school admissions process [1]. As medical students who have performed online admissions interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic, we feel that our recent experiences can add to the discussion.

The current UK pandemic guidelines made face-to-face interviews impractical, so online interviews superseded them as medical schools adapt to the changing environment. This shift provided an opportunity for our school to permit a limited number of senior medical students to work as unpaid interviewers. Through the experience, we have identified some key advantages and challenges to the adoption of online medical student interviewers.

Our experiences reflected the work of Gutowski et al. which identified that student interviewers provide significantly more feedback during interviews than faculty interviewers [2]. We theorise that this may be due to motivation. Whilst faculty interviewers might be driven by an obligation to the school, student interviewers were motivated by more intrinsic factors such as self-development. This may be especially true in our case as all student interviewees were volunteers and therefore not motivated by financial gain. Our experiences also align with Goldwag's other findings, such as finding the experience extremely rewarding [1]. Student volunteers can provide a unique perspective to the application process due to their proximity to the current curriculum, school requirements and knowledge of how the medical school system works. They can effectively empathise with the interviewees whilst being able to answer questions about the campus, curriculum or student experience. Another key advantage of online interviews would be to international student interviewees, who avoided travel

expenditure and time away from school/university, making medical school interviews more accessible.

However, the online environment exacerbated some of the current challenges faced by student interviewers. For example, due to inexperience, we were less prone to interrupt the interviewees when necessary than our faculty counterparts. Unfortunately, the online environment made this harder as the inevitable latency made identifying a break in the interviewee's sometimes rapid speech particularly difficult. Additionally, interacting via a screen made it easier for the interviewee to miss visual cues that would otherwise have signaled our intent to interrupt, and likewise as interviewers, we may have missed cues from the interviewee. Despite these difficulties, we believe that student interviewers play a significant role in the medical school admissions process and should be encouraged.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest We have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Reference

1. Goldwag JL, Panitz AK, Pinto-Powell R. Medical student involvement and perceptions of the admissions process. *Med Sci Educ*. 2020;30: 679–683. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40670-020-00950-z>
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