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INTRODUCTION

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, psychiatry residency interviews were held remotely in 2020. Recent commentary [1,2] highlights advantages and disadvantages of such virtual interviews and advocates for continued use. However, there is sparse research on students who participated in remote residency interviewing [3]. Understanding their experiences may highlight areas of improvement for future virtual interviews and develop stronger communication between both parties. Participating students commented on communication, technology and various other aspects of the remote interview process.

PURPOSE

The goal of this study is to understand the experiences of medical students applying to psychiatry residency programs during the first virtual interview application cycle. Understanding student experiences is critical to identify potential strengths and areas of improvement for future virtual residency interviews. Applicants shared their personal interview experiences which allowed for a personalized understanding of the interview experience. This will allow both programs directors and applicants to be better equipped for future virtual interviews and to further refine the interview process.

METHODS

- To assess students' experiences with the virtual interview process, two trained 3rd year medical students conducted 30-minute interviews with eight of the sixteen 4th year medical students from Wayne State University School of Medicine who matched into a psychiatry program via the National Resident Matching Program.
- The age of participants ranged from 25-36, half were female and six were Asian or Middle Eastern.
- Interviews were conducted, audio-recorded and transcribed on a video conferencing platform. Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy by both the trained interviewers and participants. The interview guide followed a temporal sequence of interview to promote recall with pre-specified prompts (e.g., videoconferencing fatigue).
- Thematic analysis was used with the team members reviewing all transcripts. The Institutional Review Board approved the study with one participant selected to win a \$100 gift certificate.

OUTCOMES

Positive Aspects

- Pre-interview activity, noting that it added a caring touch to the interview experience.
 - *And then they split us into groups of two of us with two residents, so it was a really small group so you could actually ask stuff and have a conversation...*
- Cost-saving
- More time to prepare for the interview itself. They appreciated the opportunity to schedule interviews back-to-back without having to factor in additional travel time [4].

Negative Aspects

- Inability to physically view the hospital or city in which programs were located and meet current residents.
 - *"I just want to see what their culture is like. What are they into? Do they get along? What do they hate?"*
- Dissatisfaction with virtual pre-interview socials event.
 - *"I've been looking forward to these dinners ... you just get to mingle, talk, network with all the residents and other applicants and I was so excited for that. And there's just not really a way to do that on [videoconference platform]"*
- Using multiple platforms, receiving schedules and links last minute, and requiring the participant to enter a discussion room as opposed to the program sending them.
- Fatigue
 - *"just felt like being on stage for too long"*

EVALUATION

- Participants suggested that they would have done better with an in person interview because social cues and body language are not easily read online.
- One participant said, "the ability to connect with your interviewer .. gets lost through the technology."
- Some participants stated that they were afraid to ask personal questions during the interview, because of a possible breach in privacy (recorded meetings or program directors being present in the background).
- Participants were relieved that interviews did not occur at the beginning of the pandemic before they had experience with videoconferencing in classes.

CONCLUSIONS

- Overall, participants put extensive thought and effort into virtual interview preparation and considered technology, backdrops, dress, lighting, and internet connection to minimize potential disturbances.
- Given identified concerns, program directors might consider adding virtual tours of facilities, so students can get a sense of the environment in which they will be working, as well video blogs from current residents to reveal the workplace culture [5].
- To make the pre-interview events more conducive to intimate conversation, a smaller number of students could be placed in breakout rooms with 1-2 residents.
- To ease students' anxiety, programs should send out a concise schedule of the interview day with appropriate links well in advance and confirm that the interview is not being recorded or observed.
- Given complaints of fatigue, a reduced number of interviews and scheduled breaks should be considered.
- For students unable to secure an appropriate setting for remote interviews, medical school administration should provide adequate space and support.
- Limitations include the selection bias of limited sample size at one institution with students who successfully matched into psychiatry.

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