

Virtual Interview for Residency: Not Ready for Prime Time

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Background: The average resident candidate interviews at 12 - 15 programs. Interviewing at this many programs involves a considerable cost in both time and money. Of special concern, a good deal of the programs visited by candidates are "safety programs", that the resident is visiting "just in case" he/she doesn't get into the program of their choice.

Needs Assessment: Is there any way a resident could "see more programs" without having to "travel to more programs"? Residency programs, as well, have certain limitations when interviewing candidates. No program can interview every single qualified applicant and once the "interview slots" are filled, programs may still have large numbers of potentially viable candidates.

Hypothesis: Is there any way a resident could "see more programs" without having to "travel to more programs"? Residency programs, as well, have certain limitations when interviewing candidates. No program can interview every single qualified applicant and once the "interview slots" are filled,

Curriculum Design: The Stony Brook residency selection committee invited 120 candidates for interviews during the 2008 - 09 residency interview season. We had approximately 50 additional candidates who, we felt, merited consideration, but we could not logistically handle more interviews. We contacted these candidates by e-mail and informed them that we would offer them a "virtual interview":

- we sent them a link to a 30 minute video describing our program
- we sent them a Power Point presentation describing our program
- we gave them a 20 - 30 minute phone interview
- at the end of the virtual interview, we offered them methods of contacting residents if they wanted to talk about the program
- we offered them an open invitation to come and see us if they were nearby

Results: From a theoretical standpoint, the virtual interview seemed like a good idea. These people, after all, were at least getting a chance to interview with us (the option was no contact at all). It seemed to satisfy our need to "see a lot of people" and their need to "see a lot of programs". We did end up ranking several people from the virtual interview on our list, however none of them ended up matching with us. The reaction of the people involved in the virtual interview was largely negative, with most people saying that they did not like the experience.

Conclusions: Our experience with the virtual interview was unsatisfying. No matter the theoretic advantages, people are not ready for this variant on the interview experience. As Oakley (1981, 41) has noted "the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved where the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her personal identity in the relationship". This seems to still hold true and with the installation of a web cam interview a personal identity may be able to be achieved. A comparison study done by Madge 2003 comparing web based and face to face interviewers found that by interviewing people at home the balance of power shifted to the interviewees a bit more putting them at greater ease and improving the interview process. In theory web-based interviews would save money, time and add a larger pool of candidates. But in reality the candidates felt that the virtual interview was just not personal enough for selecting a residency. Perhaps more technical approaches (Skype?) may change people's minds. But for now, the virtual interview is not ready for prime time.