

Opinion Article: The Positive Aspects of the Covid-19 Pandemic for the International Medical Graduate

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For the world over, the COVID-19 pandemic came as a shock, causing everyday life to be drastically changed. For International Medical Graduates (IMGs) who were considering pursuing their medical residency in the United States (US), the sudden closures of international borders, restrictions of flights, and closures of Prometric centers left them unable to take the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE). Two years into the pandemic, it is important to now focus on what positive aspects have been obtained from a negative situation.

Virtual Rotations

Many universities, medical schools, and hospitals shifted their clinical rotations online. This was a move that has the potential to greatly benefit IMGs. For those who need a US Visa, but do not possess one, they can still obtain relevant clinical experience, they can avoid having to pay the cost of flights, and renting accommodation, they can even do the virtual rotations while continuing to gain hands-on experience working in their home countries. These rotations have served as a form of networking and giving IMGs the opportunity to meet and interact with US attendings and other physicians from around the world.

Mentorship

Virtual services have gained prominence, whereby matched physicians can help aspirants through their match journeys by offering them relevant advice and guiding them through the process of enhancing their CV, and subsequently applying. They have also been able to offer services such as mock interview practice.

Conclusion

While the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly brought many challenges for the world, it is worthwhile to note that there have been positive aspects, including the introduction of virtual clinical rotations, virtual interviews for residency, distance educational learning, remote research opportunities, and mentorship. These avenues have allowed IMGs to gain relevant experience while saving time and money.

Remote Research

Another benefit is the advent of remote research opportunities. Increasingly, young physicians can gather, under the supervision of more senior authors to work on collaborative projects. The unique aspect of this is that these doctors can be situated in their homes, hundreds of miles apart, and still work on producing quality research papers that help advance the medical literature.

Distance Learning

Online classes have been around for many years, but with the shift to distance learning, it has increasingly been welcomed by the medical community. There are now many courses available online, sometimes even for free. It has become increasingly doable for IMGs to enhance their curriculum vitae (CV) using these resources.

Virtual Interviews

For the last two match cycles (2020-2021 and 2021-2022), the residency programs have mostly conducted their interview seasons online. While I am sure it has had its drawbacks and disadvantages, such as not being able to fully show their facilities and tour the hospitals, it had come with huge advantages for IMGs, including savings of money and time, since they do not have to travel to different states in the US, often flying to and from their home countries in the process. Not only this, but it is very convenient as they can attend interviews without having to worry about traveling from one area to another, thus reducing the possibility of having interviews overlap.