

Dear Chairs, Residency Program Directors and Interested Faculty,

Thank you for your continued support of medical education at UCSF. We write to keep you all apprised of the national conversations about critical issues in medical education, not only for our students applying for residency positions, but also for our residency programs that will be recruiting new residents in the midst of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

We understand that the COVID -19 pandemic will require you to think differently about how to advise students and select interns for this residency cycle. We are in this together and will work to make sure that both our students and your programs are well supported. Below we've addressed several important issues.

## Visiting Students and Away/Audition Rotations

**Issue:** Because of COVID-19 disruptions in availability of clinical rotations for students from all medical schools, the national availability of opportunities for visiting students is sparse and inconsistent. In addition, guidelines advising against nonessential travel and recommending 2 weeks of self-isolation for individuals traveling to a different geographic region make it very challenging for learners to schedule, arrive at and complete the usual 4 week visiting rotation or resume clerkships immediately after traveling home.

**The implications for you and your residency programs:** Realizing that these challenges create an inequitable competitive landscape for medical students from different institutions, many specialty societies have already taken steps to recommend suspension of the requirement/expectation for audition rotations as a condition of residency application and other interventions. We are grateful for the leadership of many specialty societies, who have addressed these concerns in recent statements, notably [Emergency Medicine, Dermatology, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Neurosurgery, and Otolaryngology](#). The Visiting Students Learning Opportunities (VSLO) registry has been temporarily suspended by the AAMC.

Students are understandably nervous about how this will impact their ability to get the experiences they need to successfully apply for highly competitive specialties if they do not have the opportunity to seek letters of recommendation from departments outside of UCSF.

**Recommendation:** While we are waiting on statements from the leaders of the AAMC and ACGME and other specialty societies, we offer the following guidelines for your consideration for the upcoming residency matching cycle.

1. Suspend the requirement for audition rotations for applicants to your program, particularly those who would need to travel from regions that have a high/higher prevalence of COVID-19 cases.
2. In lieu of offering rotations to outside students, offer two sub-internship rotations to UCSF students interested in matching in your discipline so that students have the opportunity to work with an increased number of your faculty over eight weeks.
3. In addition to individual faculty letters of recommendation, develop a departmental letter of recommendation (or "Chair's Letter") that clearly articulates the capabilities of each student and the type of residency program for which they are best suited. Download examples from [Medicine](#) and [Emergency Medicine](#); you may find it helpful to work with your academic societies to achieve some consensus on what these letter should entail.
4. If you have additional capacity for student rotations beyond those required to support UCSF students, we recommend that you limit accepting visiting students to those from within the west coast region and consider prioritizing requests from:

- students from within the UC system, particularly UC Riverside, which, as the youngest and smallest medical school, has scarcity of sub-internships in several disciplines.
- students from demographic groups that are underrepresented in your discipline.

## USMLE Step Exam Issues

**Issue:** Prometric, the secure exam testing organization that administers USMLE Step exams, has been closed for almost two months. A tremendous backlog of examinees exists. To date, there is no clear plan to quickly clear up this backlog, particularly since the capacity of the centers has been decreased to comply with physical distancing.

The USMLE announced upcoming changes to Step 1 score reporting to pass/fail on or after Jan 1, 2022. Despite requests from students to make this change even sooner, the USMLE has stated that they will stick to the above timeline.

**The implications for you and your residency programs:** There may well be talented applicants to your program who do not yet have a score for USMLE Step 1 (from schools, including UCSF, that administer the Step 1 exam after the clerkship year) and USMLE Step 2 CK and CS.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that you not exclude students from consideration for interviews if their application does not list a particular Step exam score. This likely reflects COVID issues rather than a concern about students' abilities. Instead, consider using MSPE information to make a decision regarding interviews.

## NRMP Issues

**Issue:** According to the AAMC dashboard, the vast majority of medical schools have suspended clinical rotations for clerkship and senior students for the past seven weeks, creating a backlog of rotations for learners.

**Implications for you and your residency program:** You can expect that fewer students will have the usual number of sub-internships prior to application than you normally see. While all schools are working hard to ensure that their students have a sub-internship in the field in which they are attempting to match, they may not have additional sub-internships that are often looked at by your internship selection committee (i.e., medicine or general surgery).

**Recommendation:** Consider advising students to request letters of recommendation from their core clerkships in relevant disciplines to submit with their application while they are waiting for a second sub-internship grade, and encourage your faculty to be particularly attentive to getting to know the 4th year students rotating on your service who may need letters of recommendation from them.

## Clerkship Grading

**Issue:** UCSF changed core clerkship grading to pass/fail (no honors) in 2019, and these students are now beginning their 4th year. We made this decision to promote fairness, equity, learning and wellbeing. Our early data show that we have succeeded in improving all of these, and these remain important priorities. Many other medical schools are now temporarily changing to pass/fail grading due to COVID-19 – and this will affect students in next year's match.

**Implications for you and your residency program:** You can expect more students' applications to come from schools with changes to core clerkship grading, or without core clerkship grades this application cycle and next, due to some schools changing grading policies temporarily or long-term.

**Recommendation:** We encourage residency programs to approach applications holistically

and look closely at our own, and all students, based on the available information in the MSPE, letters, and 4th year performance evaluations.

## Other Issues Under Discussion

There are a number of potential countermeasures under consideration at the national level. These include:

1. Altering strategies for administering USMLE Step exams
2. Delaying the ERAS application date to coincide with release of the MSPE
3. Recommending video interviews for residency recruitment and medical student application season

We are fortunate to have education deans involved in a leadership capacity at the AAMC (Dean Jones is on the Board of Directors) and the USMLE (Dean Hauer is working with the USMLE and Coalition for Physician Accountability on planning for changes to the Undergraduate Medical Education to Graduate Medical Education (GME) transition in response to the change in Step 1 score reporting to P/F). We will work to keep you apprised as soon as decisions are reached.

We recognize that your residency selection processes will be challenging this season. The Office of GME is assembling a team of experienced GME leaders, GME educators, and experienced Program Directors to help develop best practices and provide additional support for all programs during these challenging times. In addition, we are working with School of Medicine technology and communications experts to explore strategies to help you showcase your outstanding programs, communicate with your applicants and help potential recruits feel connected to UCSF, whether this interview season occurs virtually or in person.

Please let us know if there are other ways in which we can be helpful to your residency programs, to students applying in your specialty, and to your faculty who are serving in many different roles during these challenging times.

With gratitude,

Catherine, on behalf of all UCSF Medical Education Deans

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