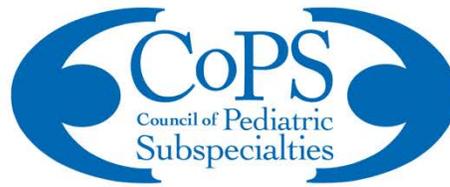




ASSOCIATION
OF PEDIATRIC
PROGRAM
DIRECTORS



APPD/CoPS/AMSPDC Letter to Our Pediatrics Community May 11, 2020

The leadership of APPD, CoPS, and AMSPDC has been working collaboratively with fellowship and residency leaders and trainees to mitigate the effects the COVID-19 pandemic is having on them and their educational programs and health systems. To prepare for the 2021 fellowship application cycle, we have developed the following recommendations for programs to adopt and incorporate into their recruitment planning processes.

Our primary goal is to optimize the recruitment process for both applicants and programs by:

- (1) Helping applicants find programs that match their career goals while providing an atmosphere conducive to their learning styles.
- (2) Providing educational programs with a consistent approach to fellowship recruitment.
- (3) Creating a fair and equitable application process for both applicants and programs.
- (4) Minimizing the disruptions created by the COVID-19 pandemic while following recommended health precautions during this interview season.

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant effect on our medical education system, including:

- (1) Altered clinical rotations, which affects residents' experiences and their abilities to obtain letters of recommendation that can describe their clinical and teaching skills
- (2) Interruption and cancellations of away rotations
- (3) Interruption of research and extracurricular activities
- (4) Travel restrictions, which may interrupt in-person interviewing
- (5) Disproportionately impacting some regions of the country, international medical graduates, and those from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds

Therefore, APPD, CoPS, and AMSPDC propose the following recommendations for the upcoming fellowship application cycle:

Recommendations to Fellowship Applicants

1. General guidance:
 - a. We are excited that you are pursuing a pediatric subspecialty. Our program leaders are here to help you navigate this process!
 - b. We recognize that you may have had variable clinical, research, advocacy, and other extracurricular experiences due to the impact of COVID-19. We have provided fellowship directors with guidance on how to perform a holistic review of applicants in order to mitigate the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Number of programs to apply to:
 - a. Each applicant should discuss their individual situation with their pediatric advisors to determine the optimal number of fellowship programs to which they should apply.
 - b. The CoPS website provides additional information about subspecialties at: <https://www.pedsubs.org/about-cops/subspecialty-descriptions/>
 1. Faculty Contacts are included within each Subspecialty Description, and at this link: <https://www.pedsubs.org/faculty-contacts/>. CoPS Faculty Contact(s) for your subspecialty of interest could be a valuable mentor, and provide guidance about applications.
 2. CoPS subspecialty representatives are also available for this consultation: <https://www.pedsubs.org/membership/representatives/>
3. Interviews:
 - a. If you need to cancel any interviews, please cancel at least 2 weeks ahead of your interview as substantial preparation goes into preparing your interview day.

Recommendations to Residency Programs

1. In advising applicants:
 - i. The CoPS website provides additional information about subspecialties at: <https://www.pedsubs.org/about-cops/subspecialty-descriptions/>
 1. Faculty Contacts are included within each Subspecialty Description, and at this link: <https://www.pedsubs.org/faculty-contacts/>. CoPs Faculty Contact(s) can provide mentorship to residents.
 2. CoPS subspecialty representatives are also available for mentorship: <https://www.pedsubs.org/membership/representatives/>
2. In writing letters of recommendation:
 - a. We recommend that the Residency Program Director provide a letter of recommendation for each applicant that addresses the following topics:
 - i. Clinical abilities, with a summary statement describing how the applicant compares to their peers clinically
 - ii. Academic goals and accomplishments to date
 - iii. Leadership skills
 - iv. The Program Directors' assessment of the applicant's academic portfolio and their long-term potential in their chosen career path
 - b. Please address if/how the applicant's rotations were changed due to COVID-19.

Recommendations to Fellowship Programs

1. In reviewing applications:
 - a. We support holistic review of applications, recognizing that access to different clinical, research, extracurricular, work, and other experiences vary significantly at baseline, and are further impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - b. Recognize that residents may have experienced non-traditional rotations during the pandemic, including virtual learning experiences and on-line educational programming.
 - c. Decrease your requirements for the number of pediatrics subspecialty letters realizing that residents may have restricted access to clinical rotations.

2. For interviews:
 - a. We strongly recommend only offering virtual interviews for this year’s Match cycle for two reasons:
 1. First and foremost, to minimize the health risks of traveling during this coronavirus pandemic.
 2. Secondly, to provide a more equitable structure for applicants and programs since some areas are disproportionately more affected by COVID-19 and some applicants are disproportionately impacted by the health and financial ramifications of COVID-19.
 - b. Virtual interviews should be used for all applicants, including local ones, to have a more equitable process.
 - c. In moving to virtual interviews, programs should develop strategies that will showcase your program virtually. We will work with you to help share best practices and help prepare applicants and faculty.
3. Timing:
 - a. To provide additional time for applicants to prepare their portfolio, we urge the AAMC to delay the release of ERAS documents to be no earlier than August 1, but no later than August 15.
 - b. If AAMC does not delay release of ERAS applications, then we recommend that programs delay reviewing applications until August 1, and do not begin sending interview invitations until August 15.
 - c. Allow a minimum of 72 hours to respond to interview invites.
 - d. Communicate with applicants as early as possible if they will receive an interview offer, be waitlisted, or not be offered an interview.

Recommendations to AAMC

We urge the AAMC to delay the release of ERAS documents to be no earlier than August 1, but no later than August 15.

We recognize that the interview season needs to be moved a bit later than usual in order to:

1. Support learners to have more time to put their applications together, and to create a more equitable process for those most affected by COVID-19.
2. Support residency program directors and other faculty to have more time to write letters of recommendation.
3. Support fellowship directors who will be busy on-boarding new fellows in nontraditional ways due to COVID-19.
4. Support fellowship programs as they will need more planning time for moving to virtual interviews.
5. Support our internal medicine colleagues who need additional time due to the differential impact of COVID-19. (Pediatrics and Internal Medicine fellowship programs are on the same schedule due to Med-Peds applicants.)

Meanwhile, we recommend not delaying releasing ERAS later than August 15, because:

1. Fellowship directors need time to do a holistic review, especially for fellowships that receive a large number of applications.

2. Should there be another wave of COVID-19 in the fall/winter, we want to ensure that there is sufficient time for interviewing.
3. We are concerned that there may be a significant overlap of fellowship interviewers and residency interviewers and thus want to ensure the interview seasons do not overlap too much.
4. Many residency programs have already made their residents' schedules for the coming year, so it would be difficult to further alter the dates of the Fall interview cycle.

We also caution to not move the season too far forward and would not recommend changing the NRMP ranking dates and match date, as time is needed to on-board and license incoming fellows post-match.

APPD, CoPS, and AMSPDC recognize that these proposed changes may place a larger burden on fellowship programs, and we appreciate all of your flexibility in order to best serve our trainees and the field of pediatrics. We will continue to share updates, innovations and best practices with you as they arise. We are grateful for your commitment to our residents and fellows and developing outstanding leaders in children's health.

