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## 2020 National Conference

# Be Prepared: Program Directors Offer Advice on Virtual Match

August 04, 2020 04:01 pm [David Mitchell \(mailto:aafpnews@aafp.org\)](mailto:aafpnews@aafp.org) – There are many factors that influence how a residency program views its applicants, but none carry more weight than a medical student's interpersonal skills and how well they interview with faculty and residents, [Deborah Clements, M.D., \(https://www.aafp.org/news/family-doc-focus/20200309fdf-clements.html\)](https://www.aafp.org/news/family-doc-focus/20200309fdf-clements.html) said in a mainstage event July 30 during the virtual National Conference of Family Medicine Residents and Medical Students.

Clements, professor and chair of Family and Community Medicine at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine and director of the Northwestern McGaw Family Medicine Residency at Lake Forest, acknowledged that making a good impression will be challenging for 2021 medical school graduates. Due to the pandemic, the AAFP and others have called for an all-virtual interview season, meaning students may not set foot in any of the programs they consider.



"You can't read the room," said Clements, immediate past president of the Association of Family Medicine Residency Directors, chair of the Council of Academic Family Medicine, treasurer of the National Resident Matching Program and immediate past chair of the Organization of Program Director Associations. "It's difficult to make that connection virtually."

Sharing your story -- and telling it well -- can help, she said.

Kristina Diaz, M.D., (<https://www.aafp.org/news/family-doc-focus/20200622fdf-diaz.html>) who shared the virtual stage with Clements, agreed.

"Go the extra step when you answer a question," said Diaz, family medicine residency director, chief academic officer and designated institutional official at Yuma Regional Medical Center. "Don't just say, 'These are my strengths,' and then sit there in awkward silence. Give a good example of your strengths. Make sure there is meat behind your answer. Demonstrate how and why you would be an asset to the program."

Diaz said providing in-depth answers will allow interviewers and applicants to engage in meaningful conversation sooner.

"Let us get to know you," she said.

Just as programs may ask about an applicant's strengths, they also are likely to ask about weaknesses. That's not the time to "humble brag," Clements said.

"If you think you have no weaknesses, maybe you're not as introspective as you should be," she said. "What is your weakness, and how do you address that weakness?"

Clements offered several commonsense suggestions to help students' interviews go as smoothly as possible:

- Prepare your interview location, including lighting and camera position, and minimize background clutter.
- Test your internet connection before each interview and consider an Ethernet connection if your Wi-Fi isn't reliable. Have a backup plan and forgive others for their technical issues.
- Consider headphones or earbuds for best sound quality.
- Dress the way you would for an in-person interview (including pants).
- Be yourself. Be authentic.
- Use the restroom before the meeting.
- Minimize distractions.

"Kids, dogs and roommates are great, but they shouldn't come along on your virtual interview," Clements said. "Find a quiet place."

Clements said it's also important for applicants to be prepared, including reading any materials a program provides before an interview. She said one of her peers gave students a form to fill out and return. The instructions included a note that specifically said to complete the form using green ink.

"The point was to see who actually was reading it," she said. "I want to know that you've done your homework. Don't ask me questions you could have found the answers to yourself on our website. Think about what you need and what you want to know about a program."

Clements suggested students develop a standard set of questions to ask at each interview and take notes that can be referred to later when it's time to make a rank order list.

The interview process should help students learn which programs can help them become the best

family physicians they can be, she said.

"Are you a good fit?" Clements asked. "Do you have shared values? Will you be happy there?"

Diaz encouraged students to "be ready with meaningful questions so you can get the information you're looking for."

For example, she said, if students are interested in global health, they should ask what opportunities the residency program offers and how it can help applicants pursue that interest.

"Really figure out what your passions are," she said. "As a program director, I want to give you the experience you want."

A 2018 survey (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6047386/>) found that U.S. allopathic seniors applied to an average of 45 programs and completed an average of 13 interviews at significant costs. There are concerns that the removal of travel expenses in a virtual Match process will lead some students to apply and interview at more programs than usual. Clements cautioned that although students may be tempted to try that tactic, programs do not have additional time for applications and interviews.

"Don't apply to programs you wouldn't have traveled to before COVID-19," she said. "Apply wisely."

The AAFP has resources to help. Students can build a list of interview questions by topic using suggested questions in [Strolling through the Match](#).

([https://www.aafp.org/content/dam/AAFP/documents/medical\\_education\\_residency/the\\_match/strolling-match.pdf](https://www.aafp.org/content/dam/AAFP/documents/medical_education_residency/the_match/strolling-match.pdf)) The list is also available as an interactive Match tool in [the AAFP app](#).


(<https://www.aafp.org/membership/benefits/resources/app.html>) The Academy also has created [an FAQ specific to the virtual match](#). ([https://www.aafp.org/content/dam/AAFP/documents/medical\\_education\\_residency/the\\_match/COVID-19-match-impact.pdf](https://www.aafp.org/content/dam/AAFP/documents/medical_education_residency/the_match/COVID-19-match-impact.pdf))

Students who registered for the conference can [watch the mainstage session again](#)

(<https://www.virtualeventplace.com/en?t=/CustomCode/webcasts/videoContainer&id=1594262299980>) anytime this month.

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[https://www.aafp.org/news/education-professional-development/20200804nc-match.html?cmpid=em\\_AP\\_20200730](https://www.aafp.org/news/education-professional-development/20200804nc-match.html?cmpid=em_AP_20200730)

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