



Letter to the Editor

A Call for Waiving the MCAT at our Medical School in the 2021 Application Cycle

By Javier Mora, MD-Candidate 2021

Recently, Dr. David Skorton, President of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), and Dr. Joseph Kerschner as Chair of AAMC Board of Directors, penned an open letter to medical school applicants upholding the importance and new safety measures when taking the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) this application cycle. They failed to make the MCAT optional across the board for applicants despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, particularly noting that doing so “could ultimately disadvantage students from underrepresented and lower socioeconomic backgrounds by taking away their opportunity to take the exam and meaningfully compete with other applicants.”

I find this sentiment problematic. Objectively, there have been [reports](#) of examinees nationally diagnosed with COVID-19 immediately following the MCAT examination. AAMC also cancelled two exam periods in Portland, Oregon because of recent public demonstrations near testing sites. Studying for the MCAT is challenging, but it can quickly become insurmountable amidst a pandemic that is only amplified in applicants of underrepresented and lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

As the former executive chair of our school chapter of the Student National Medical Association (SNMA) undergraduate outreach initiatives, I was responsible for co-developing our pre-medical conference series focusing on the unique needs of underrepresented applicants, “Bridging the Gap.” We have had much organizational success in engaging pre-medical students from both local and regional Midwestern colleges, and “Bridging the Gap” found programming continuity with subsequent SNMA student leadership. In panel discussions, we confirmed that pre-medical students are frequently

preoccupied with studying for the MCATs. They were ecstatic when we raffled Kaplan books to help partially offset MCAT preparation costs.

The MCAT represents a significant barrier for successful matriculation to medical school to the underrepresented, lower socioeconomic status applicant. The hidden costs of preparing for the MCAT with exam-tailored coursework, supplemental materials, and examination fees is often financially prohibitive. Adding to the intellectual demand of MCAT studying, the ongoing pandemic disproportionately affects minoritized communities where these students often hail from. Many have personally lost family and friends to COVID-19, been victims of structural or direct violence, become unemployed or, conversely, needed to work additional hours to assist their households suffering from the global economic downturn, or were separated from their college and university learning communities.

If there was ever a year to waive the MCAT requirement to increase opportunity for underrepresented students, this is the year. Waiving the MCAT would transform medical education by making the entry point reflect holistic assessment and reflect our value of caring for the entire person in similitude to our care for patients.

There is precedent. Medical school admission offices at Stanford University, University of Minnesota, University of Washington, and Dartmouth College have already pledged to waive the MCAT requirement this year. The national American Medical Women's Association (AMWA), American College of Perioperative Medicine (ACPM), American Medical Student Association (AMSA), American Physician Scientists Association (APSA), Asian Pacific American Medical Student Association (APAMSA), Association of Women Psychiatrists (AWP), Doctors for America (DFA), Latino Medical Student Association (LMSA), Medical Student Pride Alliance (MSPA), National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA), National Medical Association (NMA), and the American College of Physicians are all in agreement.

We have the opportunity for our MCW Office of Admissions to do the same. As an underrepresented student myself, I will never tire of broadening perspectives with the hope that equity-minded future physicians are able to successfully enter the medical profession where we can provide care competently and

compassionately to those marginalized by our healthcare system. In a time of unprecedented change, let's respond to act and work for a transformation at the onset of medical education by waiving the MCAT requirement and performing holistic reviews.

Mr. Mora is a student at MCW-Milwaukee in the Class of 2021.