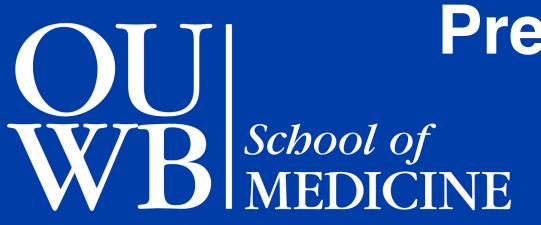
Pre-medical Student Concerns Regarding Applying to Medical School During COVID-19 Pandemic



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Introduction

Background: Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on premedical experience may include:

- University/research lab closures
- Transition to virtual undergraduate lectures¹
- Reduced clinical exposure through volunteering and shadowing opportunities^{1,2}
- Delays in medical school applications²

Anticipated outcome: Themes regarding the quality of virtual learning, long-term impact on medical education, and difficulty establishing social and professional connections will be identified.

Aims and Objectives

Aim: Identify the core concerns of pre-medical students regarding applying to medical school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objective: To qualitatively evaluate posts made on www.studentdoctor.net medical school admission threads for 2 MD- 1 private, 1 public- medical schools located in the East, Midwest, West, and South of the country for a total of 8 medical schools compared.

Methods

Randomized selection of 8 medical schools, 4 public and 4 private, across four geographic regions to maintain rigor of study

Generation of initial codes from a data set of 6953 posts from March-December of 2019 and 2020 for the selected schools

Inductive coding approach utilized to identify common and unique themes regarding pre-medical student concerns during 2020-2021 admission cycle

Figure 1. Methods utilized to complete thematic analysis

- Sample size selected to provide adequate variety of responses needed to achieve study goal³
- Standard thematic analysis process was conducted⁴

'So what does everyone think about how covid will affect this speedy interview invite turn around time?"

"with Covid19 affecting MCAT score release dates, I'm not exactly sure what their process is for this year'

Results

'Ya pretty annoying it's taking so long, but there's a pandemic going on so it's expected"

does anyone know if mercer interviews still in person or have they moved them online?"

Theme 1: Changes to application process secondary to the pandemic

- Delays in application processing
- Shift to virtual interview format
- Limited communication regarding timeline changes

Theme 3: Cost of attendance and availability of financial

- Eligibility for scholarships
- Matriculation decisions based on aid offered and cost of attendance
- In state vs. out of state cost gap

'I would use (...) this heirarchy: Full ride anywhere >>> really good financial aid at a top school > decent aid at state school > really good aid at mid tier school > decent aid at top school > state school > decent aid at top school > top school >decent aid at mid tier school > mid tier school >>>>> rejection everywhere"

"If you have a cheaper option, I'd prob take it."

> withdrew my II because i can't justify the cost to attend oos, hope it goes to someone great!"

"Does anyone know" how USC is w financial aid? any scholarships? Need/merit?"

curriculum is changing fall 2020 - I'm particularly interested in how this will change the topics covered in the Doctoring 1 (...) I was wondering if someone

could speak to this."

Well honestly right

now with covid, I

don't know what

the new situation

will be like"

"I saw that Temple's

might be changing their curriculum to 1.5 pre clinical years anybody hear of this?'

Rumor is Keck

Theme 2: Curriculum changes

- Ambiguity of COVID-19 impact on curriculum
- Lack of available information regarding planned curriculum

Theme 4: Cost and coordination of application and interviews

- Application fees, interview travel costs, and coordination of flights and interview dates were a common concern across all the public school forums in 2019
- In 2020, no interview date conflicts or interview/application fee concerns were expressed

"Any August 12th "my secondary \$\$ interviewers wanna came out of my go 50/50 on a hotel grocery budget" room at the Hyatt?"

"I applied to multiple Chicago schools and am going to have to travel nearly 4,000 miles to interview if I'm invited.'

"Anyone have any advice on ITA emails? (...) it'd really be nice not to have to fly there twice."

Conclusions

- In contrast to initial expectations, concerns regarding a shift to virtual learning, social and professional dynamics, and long-term impact of the pandemic on medical education were not found in the studied forums.
- Delayed application submission and decision timelines were the greatest concerns regarding pandemic effects
- Concerns regarding a lack of clear directives and definitive timelines with respect to admission decisions, individual school application policies, and medical school curriculum changes were present in all forums
- A decrease in core concerns regarding cost and coordination of interviews was noted from 2019 to 2020 as interviews shifted to an online format, negating the need for transportation, hotel costs, and coordination of multiple interviews in the same geographic region.

Limitations: The topic of COVID-19 and associated changes was not as prevalent in medical school admissions forums as expected, leading to a small data set relevant to this issue. The population electing to post on www.studentdoctor.net may not be representative of the medical school applicant population as a whole.

Applications: Data collected from these public forums could better prepare medical school administrations to address student concerns when implementing curriculum changes or altering admissions processes in the future. The reduction in concerns regarding cost and coordination with virtual interviews may be relevant in future interview format decisions by admissions staff.

Medical student concerns regarding applying to medical school during the COVID-19 pandemic were centered around changes to the application process, curriculum changes, and cost of attendance.

References

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