



ACR Committee on Rheumatology Training and Workforce Issues Recommendations for the 2023-24 Internal Medicine and Pediatric Fellowship Application Cycle

The interview process for rheumatology and pediatric rheumatology fellowship applicants has included virtual-only interviews for the last three application cycles due initially to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, programs and applicants have identified both limitations and benefits to virtual interview format. While perhaps not the ideal way to evaluate a program, virtual interviews were largely viewed as adequate by both programs and applicants in rheumatology^{1,2}, and significant cost and time savings were gained. As the pandemic restrictions and barriers have eased, questions about resuming in-person interviews or program “second-look” visits have become more complex. Although many institutions, specialties, programs, and other organizations have started to consider ways to improve the application and interview process, there remain many unanswered questions on how to best balance the concerns of cost and equity with the applicant and program experience.

The ACR Committee on Training and Workforce Issues advocates for the following principles when deciding on recommendations for the recruitment and interview process:

- Transparency and communication to optimize information exchange and opportunities for applicants and programs.
- Intentional efforts to mitigate bias and optimize equity and inclusion in the interview selection and ranking process.
- Ensuring a recruitment process that will enhance the future rheumatology workforce.

NRMP, the National Resident Matching Program, solicited comments in early 2023 for a Voluntary Rank Order List lock functionality. This proposal included a window of time during which applicants could choose to visit a program AFTER programs had irreversibly finalized their lists, thereby reducing concerns about bias in the selection process. Subsequent feedback from learners, program leadership, and institutional stakeholders prompted the NRMP to continue to study and develop this idea for possible use in future application cycles³.

For 2023-24, the ACR Committee on Training and Workforce Issues supports statements released by internal medicine and pediatric academic specialty societies^{4,5}, and makes the following recommendations:

- **All rheumatology and pediatric rheumatology fellowship interviews should be conducted virtually.**
 - o We recommend against any in-person or hybrid interviews even among applicants who are already local to the programs to which they are applying.
- **Fellowship programs should not sponsor or host any in-person second-look visits.**
 - o Program faculty should not be using second-look visits to evaluate applicants.

- Departments or institutions may choose to host applicants who want to visit the area, but we recommend that program directors, program faculty, fellows, and program coordinators have no role in the second look visit.
- If such visits are made available at an institution, they should be made available to all applicants selected to interview; fellowship program leadership should not select subsets of interviewees to invite for a follow-up visit either before or following a virtual interview.
- We recommend that institutions that sponsor both pediatric and adult fellowships try to coordinate any opportunities for such visits if they choose to make them available.
- **Programs should communicate clearly with applicants** the candidate's status with regards to selection for interviews (invited/wait-list/rejected) and the availability and nature of any optional second look experiences that may be available at that institution.
- **Equity, inclusion, and fairness** should remain key components of the application review and interview process. Resources for faculty to mitigate bias during interviews, for standardized application review and interview questions, and education for residents participating in virtual interviews should be identified and adapted as needed.

The committee recognizes that many fellowship candidates and many programs would prefer and would benefit from opportunities to interact in person during the recruitment and interview process. We will continue to explore mechanisms (such as the NRMP's proposed Voluntary Rank List Locking functionality) that might mitigate the potential for bias in the review process while still allowing for in-person visits.

The ACR Committee on Rheumatology Training and Workforce Issues again advocates for high quality informational resources for applicants, transparency in communications regarding the selection process, and consistency across the specialty where possible. Virtual experience should not decrease the breadth and depth of information shared with the applicant and should ensure an equally informative process for all applicants.

References:

1. Saygin D, Marston B, Couette N, et al. [Trainee Perspectives on Virtual Applicant Interviews](#). *The Rheumatologist*. 2022
2. Kilian A, Marston B. [Virtual recruitment in 2020 and beyond: Rheumatology Fellowship Program Directors Survey results](#). *The Rheumatologist*. 2021
3. NRMP to engage constituents in a Match Innovations Summit in response to public comments on the proposed Voluntary Rank Order List (ROL) Lock functionality. (June 7, 2023). National Residency Match Program. Retrieved from <https://www.nrmp.org/about/news/2023/06/nrmp-to-engage-constituents-in-a-match-innovations-summit-in-response-to-public-comments-on-the-proposed-voluntary-rank-order-list-rol-lock-functionality/>
4. AAIM Recommendations for Internal Medicine Fellowship Interview Season. (June 1, 2023). Alliance for Academic Medicine. Retrieved from https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/IM/fecab58a-0e31-416b-8e56-46fc9eda5c37/UploadedImages/resources/AAIM_Recommendations_for_Internal_Medicine_Fellowship_Interview_Season.pdf
5. APPS/CoPS/AMSPDC Letter to Pediatric Fellowship Programs and Subspecialty Organizations About the Fellowship Recruitment Process. Info@peds.sub.org. "Fw: Fellowship Recruitment Action Team Letters" Received April 10, 2023. (proper reference citation pending)