

## Improving the residency application process with application and interview caps



*To the Editor:* The dermatology residency application process has become increasingly burdensome in recent years. The average number of applications submitted and interviews attended per graduating medical student have increased significantly, leading to a high financial burden for applicants. It is estimated that in 2014, the average successful applicant spent more than \$11,000 on the application process.<sup>1</sup> This cost has resulted in creating another barrier to application for students of low socioeconomic status. This issue has been amplified and underscored by the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic and has been discussed in many publications.<sup>1,2</sup>

In response to the pandemic, the Association of Professors of Dermatology published a statement recommending that graduating allopathic students apply to a maximum of 40 to 60 programs and attend a maximum of 12 to 15 interviews. Although these recommendations were intended to curtail application volumes, they had little effect on student behavior.<sup>3</sup>

We wholeheartedly agree with the changes suggested by the Association of Professors of Dermatology and further propose that mandatory application and interview caps be implemented. Data published by the Association of American Medical Colleges demonstrate little benefit to applying to more residency programs after a certain number.<sup>4</sup> For applicants with step 1 scores greater than or equal to 252, 239 to 251, and less than or equal to 238, there are diminishing returns after applying to 37, 42, and 62 programs, respectively.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, an applicant's chance of matching to dermatology plateaus after attending 12 to 15 interviews.<sup>5</sup>

Our proposed solution has the potential to benefit both applicants and residency programs. Applicants will save money and this will potentially level the playing field for students of lower socioeconomic status. Similarly, an interview cap will save applicants time. In the current match process, students routinely take a month or more away from their fourth-year curriculum to interview for residency. Additionally, interviews may be distributed more equitably among applicants because a cap may prevent the strongest applicants from taking more interviews than they need and allow other qualified students with genuine interest the opportunity to interview.

Residency programs will benefit because they will likely receive fewer applications per position. With the current deluge of applications that programs receive, it is difficult for them to review applications thoroughly and holistically owing to constraints on faculty time. Many programs rely on quantitative metrics, such as United States medical licensing examination scores, to filter applications. This disadvantages several groups of applicants, including underrepresented in medicine students, and may prevent programs from considering students who are otherwise qualified, compatible with their programs' values, or have overcome obstacles in their journey.

To address any unforeseen potential pitfalls of our proposed solution, we suggest adjusting caps regularly as new data become available. Additionally, determining appropriate caps may be difficult for certain groups of applicants, such as international medical graduates and reapplicants.

Given the increasing financial burden and time costs associated with the residency match, it is imperative that changes be made to improve the process. Interview and application caps have the potential to make the match a fairer and more equitable process for all.

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### Conflicts of interest

Dr Feng is a consultant for Cytrellis Biosystems Inc and Soliton Inc. Dr Grant-Kels and Author Muzumdar have no relevant conflicts of interest to declare.

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