



## CFMS Member Memo #7: COVID-19 Effects on Medical Education and CFMS Operations

Dear Students,

Earlier today the AFMC announced decisions regarding the 2021 R1 Match timelines. You will find the official news release [here](#). In follow-up, we are focusing this memo on sharing the advocacy we have been doing over the last 7 weeks to represent student perspectives nationally.

A separate memo on the MCCQE Part I and transition to residency for the class of 2020 was released on Friday May 1<sup>st</sup>. We extend congratulations to the class of 2020 for all their accomplishments so far! We will continue to support our final year students until they start residency and beyond. Good Luck 2020s on your MCCQE I!

### Advocacy Principles on 2021 R1 Match Timelines, Interviews and Return to Clerkship

The CFMS has been representing student perspectives during the entirety of these discussions. All stakeholders in the match are having to make adjustments and compromises because of the significant effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We will continue working closely with the faculties to ensure we develop processes to operationalize the decisions that have been announced today. We understand the decisions represent significant changes and may be stressful to adjust to. *Below we hope to summarize how we have advocated on behalf of students in regard to return to clerkship dates, R1 match timelines, interviews and more in the last few weeks. Please note these are ADVOCACY points and are not meant to communicate decisions. Announcements regarding official decisions will come directly from AFMC and/or your faculties.*

### R1 Match Timelines:

Part of the AFMC announcement today included adjusted R1 match timelines for this year which overall align with our advocacy. Assuming all 2021s return by July, we have **advocated** for the following with regards to R1 Match timelines:

- R1 Match Timelines need to be adjusted in order to accommodate the significant time students have been away from clinical duties.
  - We advocated that the application deadline be moved to February 2021 (since most students will have been off for around 3 months and application deadlines are usually in mid-November.) We wanted to facilitate the opportunity for more elective time and ensure applications were not due right after winter break. We advocated that the rest of the match timeline be compressed to ensure students in the class of 2021 can start residency on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. The CFMS proposed dates for the 2021 R1 match that are very similar to what was announced today.
- We should prioritize maximizing the opportunities for students to participate in electives and prepare their residency applications.
- Adequate time needs to be given for students to transition to residency after match results are released. Thus the latest second iteration match day should happen is mid-May to provide at least 6 weeks between second iteration match results and July 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Postgraduate programs and regulators should work to expedite the process of residency licensing to help accommodate this.
- The MCC exam delivery dates should be adjusted to accommodate the new 2021 R1 Match timeline. The MCCQE I exam should continue to be written prior to the start of residency.

### - Residency Application Requirements and File Review:

We will continue to advocate and represent students on any sub-committees that may be created to re-evaluating the residency application requirements for 2021. A few major points of emphasis include:

- On-site electives:



- As there will be less opportunity for visiting electives, on-site electives should be de-emphasized during the file review and ranking of applicants.
- Reference Letters:
  - Due to decreased elective time and significant changes to clerkship, the reference letter requirements should be adjusted. Some suggestions include:
    - A reduction in the minimum number of reference letters required.
    - Setting a maximum number of letters that can be required by a program, and implementing a consistent maximum for all PGME programs.
    - Greater acceptability in regards to the scope of acceptable referees.
- **COVID-19 initiatives-academic credit and residency applications:**
  - Recognizing that students will have faced different challenges at this time (e.g. caring for family members, illness), we are advocating that interviewers should not be able to explicitly ask what students did during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students are always able to list their contributions on their own CVs or voluntarily discuss their experiences during interviews. Interviewers and file reviewers should be briefed on various factors that may have prevented learners in partaking in different initiatives in response to COVID-19 so that bias is minimized.
- **Interviews:**

Today the AFMC announced that the 2021 R1 match interviews will be conducted virtually. This is a significant change and was recognize this may heighten anxiety given all of the other changes announced. We would like to reinforce some background information:

Virtual interviews have been discussed for the last few years as a possible alternative to the in-person method. Some of the reasons virtual interviews have been brought up in past years include:

  - Residency interviews usually take place in mid-January to early-Feb. Every year there are many students who have significant difficulties attending all their interviews due to travel issues. As a result, some of their interviews need to be done online/virtually. In these cases, students note they feel significantly disadvantaged. In some instances residency programs felt they could not accommodate and thus students missed out on an opportunity.
  - Students attend on average 8 interviews during the residency matching process, although the range is very wide. You may have heard of colleagues doing 15+ interviews. The costs associated with this can be burdensome, especially for those who are doing interviews across the country. While the average cost associated with the interview tour is close to \$3000, some will spend much more than this. In addition, data from CaRMS survey indicates around close to 20% of students decline an average of 2+ interviews due to cost.
  - More recently there has been increased spotlight on the environmental impact of the R1 residency match tour.
- Virtual Interviews have been considered pertinent for the 2021 match because:
  - By moving to virtual interviews, limiting travel requirements and having increased flexibility of interview times offered it was expected we could compress timelines both during the interview period and in the file review/interview booking period.
  - The second iteration of the R1 2020 match was done using entirely virtual interviews.
  - There is significant concern that the travel associated with the way in-person interviews had been done may be problematic even in early 2021 (i.e. cannot board a plane if you have any viral symptoms). Preparations for transitioning to virtual interviews requires significant work and if the decision were not to be made until much later this would result in a significantly worse interview experience for students.
- **Interviews Advocacy:**

During the discussion leading up to the AFMC board decision on the interview format, the CFMS raised student concerns, questions and perspectives some of which included: (please note this is not all encompassing)



- Ranking a program and thus making a 2-5 year commitment without ever visiting the site is difficult. Could this have the consequence of decreasing the number of programs applicants rank?
- Even if all interviews are done virtually, there were concerns that home school candidates as well as those who have done in-person electives may be further advantaged.
- An important part of the interview day is the opportunity to learn more about and explore the residency program. Students also need to “interview the programs”.
- Will programs adjust how they evaluate candidates if they are not able to interview them in person and thus emphasize other aspects of the application?
- **Ongoing Interviews Advocacy:**  
We will continue raising student concerns and perspectives regarding the interviews process as we work collaboratively with faculties to develop official processes and guidelines for the interviews. Some of our ongoing **advocacy** points will include:
  - We have advocated that if a decision was made to do virtual interviews this must be the case for all programs and for all applicants. We will continue to ensure this is the case.
  - Residency programs must offer opportunities for learners to hear from current residents and learn more about the program through virtual methods. Virtual tours of the program and facilities must be offered and increased access to these presentations and discussion/ Q& A sessions must be facilitated.
  - In order to facilitate the compressed match timelines we should develop a centralized online booking system that helps ensure residency programs coordinate interviews to minimize overlap.
  - As with all processes that employ technology, accommodations must be made for technical difficulties and no applicants should be faulted for issues related to technology.
  - Accommodations for students who have health conditions that make engaging in virtual interviews more difficult need to be implemented.

#### **Class of 2021 Return to Clerkship/Education Principles:**

Medical schools have begun announcing potential return to clerkship dates which vary depending on the situation in your particular province and local municipalities.

The CFMS has been representing students nationally on return to clerkship timelines and principles. In discussions regarding when it will be appropriate for students to return to clinical training and how to adjust training due to COVID-19 the CFMS has and will continue to raise these questions and advocacy points:

- **Public Health and Safety**
  - Are students being on clinical rotations contributing significantly to increased disease transmission and further straining demand on PPE?
- **Student Physical and Mental Wellbeing**
  - We must ensure students are not placed at excessive risk for infection.
  - Students should be provided a re-orientation to the clinical learning environment given the significant changes that will have been made prior to re-starting clinical rotations.
  - Are there sufficient mental health support for learners and physicians as we face increased demands due to the pandemic.
  - How can we ensure that we minimize burnout for learners with the reorganization of rotations? With the extended absence from clerkship, we want to ensure that if rotations are shortened in overall length (i.e. from 6 weeks to 4 weeks) that students are not subjected to excessive call duties and are still given adequate time for studying and learning.
  - Are accessible processes in place to manage accommodations for students returning to clerkship with special circumstances?
  - Students should be given adequate notice to prepare for returning to clerkship and informed about changes regarding clerkship curriculum as soon as possible.
- **Faculty/Hospital Staff Safety and Ability to supervise**



- Faculty must be sufficiently supported to supervise and teach students
- Students and faculty both need to be provided comprehensive information on new safety considerations to continue protecting ourselves and patients.
- **Learning**
  - Are students participating in roles with educational value? Are students contributing positively to the overall healthcare setting?
  - How do we optimize learning opportunities specific to the pandemic, while maintaining learner safety and wellbeing?
  - Are there some rotations that will have learning opportunities sooner than others?
  - What additional activities can clerkship students be involved in right now that supplement their learning?
  - How can learners be involved in virtual medicine?
    - Following the virtual care task force report and working group on education, can we implement virtual care learning objectives quickly?
- **Core Rotations and Elective Experiences:**
  - We have advocated that students should, where possible, return to core rotations prior to the start of elective blocks. We understand there may be issues from a capacity standpoint, but this will provide more time to become familiar with a given clinical environment. Since there is likely to be less elective time overall we also want to ensure students have the majority of elective time when visiting electives might be an option.
- **Electives:**
  - The AFMC visiting electives portal should be closed for applications to all schools until a universally agreed upon date.
  - Students who have previously confirmed electives that are cancelled must receive communication from the host school and a full refund.
  - Schools should not support or facilitate other methods of booking electives outside of those currently employed.
  - Students should have adequate opportunity to participate in electives experiences for career exploration purposes. Every effort should be made to accommodate visiting electives for the class of 2021. Programs should consider having similar numbers of elective weeks.
  - The visiting electives portal should open at the same time for students regardless of when students return to clerkship.
  - Visiting electives are especially important because some schools do not have elective opportunities in all 30 entry route disciplines locally.
  - Given the potential that there will be further disruptions for visiting electives due to travel issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, flexible refund policies must be maintained
  - Students should receive 2 weeks notification before AFMC portal applications open.
  - Please also note the AFMC portal has an updated FAQ section [here](#).
- **Clerkship Assessments:**
  - Assessments should be competency focused rather than time-based. Programs should be open to adjusting the duration of core rotations provided students are able to meet the learning objectives
  - Online/distance-proctored exams must be accompanied with appropriate accommodations for students to maximize accessibility.
  - Given the compressed timeline that will result from this extended absence from clerkship, remediation and academic support plans need to be prepared in advance.
- **General Advocacy Points:**
  - **Finances:**



- Financial impact of COVID-19 pandemic on learners is considered and taken into account in decision making
- **Communication:**
  - Open, transparent communication between faculties and learners are paramount during this time of significant uncertainty

### **Class of 2022 Advocacy**

- While much of the focus has been on the class of 2021 and their return to clerkship, discussions regarding the class of 2022s curriculum are also ongoing. Points we will be bringing up include:
  - Adjustments to the 2022 clerkship schedules should be communicated as soon as possible. The class of 2022 should be sufficiently consulted and informed of the reasoning behind changes.
  - Every effort should be made to minimize disruptions in the class of 2022s clerkship education
  - Information regarding what is permitted in the “summer” between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year for 4 year schools should be clarified as soon as possible.

### **Second Iteration R1 2020 Match**

Second iteration match day was April 15<sup>th</sup>. The CFMS put out a press release which is you can access [here](#). We continue to call for an increase in residency positions as one of the major interventions to continue decreasing the number of unmatched Canadian medical graduates. This year’s match results also continue to highlight the importance of a national health human resource strategy. We are here to support students who will not yet be starting residency on July 1<sup>st</sup> in any way we can.

### **Wellness and Financial Resources**

In collaboration with our member schools we have this spreadsheet of [wellness resources](#). We have a new Facebook page: CFMS Staying Connected During COVID which has over 500 student members who are sharing ways to stay well during this difficult period. You can get the link from your school wellness representatives. Check out our social media @CFMSFEMC for contests to keep you engaged.

Our VP Finance Anson Lee, also put together a document outlining financial implications of COVID-19 that apply to medical students that you might want to check out [here](#). Additional information on the Canada emergency student benefit will be available soon.

### **CFMS Spring General Meeting and Elections**

Our first ever virtual CFMS SGM took place April 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. We had almost 250 students join us which is record attendance for a CFMS meeting. We were joined by CaRMS and the AFMC who gave updates and answered student questions. Initial feedback has been very positive and we are looking to further expand virtual components of our meetings moving forward. **I am pleased to introduce Henry Li as President-Elect. We also elected portfolio VPs and Directors and we look forward to welcoming Anson Lee, Avrilynn Ding, Vivian Tan, Yotakahron Jonathan, Lucas King and Sehjal Bhargava. You can review our board reports [here](#)**

### **Final Thoughts**

The board continues to work tirelessly to connect, represent and support students during COVID-19. We will continue to let you know about our advocacy points and communicate decisions that are made. Thank you to the board and all of the MedSoc Presidents (and all of our members) for your ongoing feedback. These principles come from you!

As always if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at [president@cfms.org](mailto:president@cfms.org)  
Sincerely,

Victor Do  
CFMS President, 2019-2020