

# A Special Thank You to the Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Medical Education Community During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ogonna N. Nnamani Silva, MD

We will remember these moments during the COVID-19 pandemic as truly unprecedented times. Communities across the world are adjusting to realities imposed on each of us by the pandemic. When narrowing the scope to evaluate the effects of COVID-19 on medical education, the Association of Medical Colleges recommended that medical institutions adjust student experiences based on regional trends, availability of personal protective equipment, and valuable educational experiences.<sup>1</sup> In response to the uncertainty, residency application deadlines have been delayed.<sup>2</sup> In the context of the upcoming plastic and reconstructive surgery match, the consequences of these alterations are not well understood, especially following the most competitive application cycle in history.<sup>3</sup>

Visiting subinternships have become commonplace in plastic and reconstructive surgery, and subinternship performance has become a critical factor utilized in the selection process.<sup>4</sup> Because of COVID-19, leading organizations discouraged visiting subinternships and in-person interviews.<sup>5</sup>

The American Council of Academic Plastic Surgeons (ACAPS) leaders had the thoughtfulness to relay words of encouragement to the next generation of plastic surgeons during this time. They responded promptly and creatively to leverage technology and social media to facilitate interactive webinars for prospective applicants. The ACAPS sessions have advised students on a wide array of topics (ie, application pearls and pitfalls, mentorship).<sup>6</sup> American Council of Academic Plastic Surgeons also facilitated mentorship opportunities for international medical graduates and students without plastic and reconstructive surgery divisions or departments at their home institutions. Sessions have provided residency programs with a platform to showcase themselves, and applicants are able to see a wide variety of programs. Sessions have been outstanding, informative, and efficient, allowing prospective applicants to familiarize themselves with unique program attributes, faculty and residents. I am appreciative that programs have taken time out of their hectic schedules to participate. Given the virtual setting, prospective applicants are able to connect with more programs, which might otherwise not have been possible in the original format. Institutions have also leveraged social media to provide similar content and educational programming. Adaptations transitioning in-person experiences to virtual settings may set precedence for future experiences and mitigate concerns stemming from increased costs of subinternship auditions and interview travel.<sup>7</sup> Virtual sessions help democratize the application process by affording prospective applicants and residency programs the chance to interact with a broader audience.

In light of this uncertainty, one thing is certain: the passion for plastic and reconstructive surgery possessed by the faculty and residents is palpable and has reinforced my love for the field. A sense of community is emerging among the prospective applicants; even though we will not have the chance to meet on the interview trail, our network is starting to develop that will hopefully mirror the strong community that exists among faculty and residents across different institutions.

Thank you to ACAPS, program directors, coordinators, faculty, and residents. You have demonstrated an outstanding commitment to support prospective applicants during this difficult time. Thank you for inspiring the future generation; thank you for the laughs that you cannot hear because I am muted, and thanks for building a community. I look forward to the day we will meet in person.

## REFERENCES

1. Important guidance for medical students on clinical rotations during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. AAMC. <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/press-releases/important-guidance-medical-students-clinical-rotations-during-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>. Accessed July 20, 2020.
2. ERAS 2021 residency timeline. <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-residency/article/eras-timeline-md-residency/>. Accessed July 20, 2020.
3. MM\_Results\_and-Data\_2020-1.pdf. [https://mk0nrm3oyqui6wqfjn.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/MM\\_Results\\_and-Data\\_2020-1.pdf](https://mk0nrm3oyqui6wqfjn.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/MM_Results_and-Data_2020-1.pdf). Accessed July 20, 2020.
4. Molina Burbano F, Yao A, Burish N, et al. Solving congestion in the plastic surgery match: a game theory analysis. *Plast Reconstr Surg*. 2019;143:634–639.
5. covid19\_Final\_Recommendations\_Executive\_Summary\_Final\_05112020.pdf. [https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-05/covid19\\_Final\\_Recommendations\\_Executive%20Summary\\_Final\\_05112020.pdf](https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-05/covid19_Final_Recommendations_Executive%20Summary_Final_05112020.pdf). Accessed July 20, 2020.
6. American Council of Academic Plastic Surgeons—American Council of Academic Plastic Surgeons. <https://acaplasticsurgeons.org/>. Accessed July 20, 2020.
7. Patel V, Nolan IT, Morrison SD, et al. Visiting subinternships in wake of the COVID-19 crisis: an opportunity for improvement. *Ann Plast Surg*. 2020;85(2S suppl 2):S153–S154.

Received July 31, 2020, and accepted for publication August 30, 2020, after revision August 30, 2020.

From the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine, San Francisco, CA.

Conflicts of interest and sources of funding: none declared.

Reprints: Ogonna N. Nnamani Silva, MD, University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine, San Francisco, CA, 94143. E-mail: Ogonna.Nnamani@ucsf.edu.

Copyright © 2020 Wolters Kluwer Health, Inc. All rights reserved.

ISSN: 0148-7043/21/8602–0125

DOI: 10.1097/SAP.0000000000002568