


PGY1 Resident-Led Mock Virtual Interviews to Prepare for the 2022 Otolaryngology Residency Virtual Interviews

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Abstract

Due to the ongoing coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, virtual interviews are planned for the 2021-2022 residency application cycle. The virtual interview will remain novel to applicants for each match cycle until the graduating medical student class has experience from virtual interviews during their medical school admissions. The virtual interview poses unique challenges that are unique from in-person formats. Given the lack of experience of applicants in the 2022 match, practicing interviewing skills prior to the actual date is vital to success. We describe a postgraduate year 1 (PGY1)–run mock interview session for applicants preparing for the 2021-2022 otolaryngology interview cycle and discuss the methodology. Deliberate practice with PGY1 residents who have just recently undergone the virtual interview process can better prepare applicants for their virtual interviews, improve on-camera behaviors, and ameliorate mental health challenges unique to the virtual format.

Keywords

mock interview, virtual interview, resident mentors, medical student, residency application

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The Coalition for Physician Accountability recommends that residency programs continue virtual interviews during the 2021-2022 interview cycle.¹ This virtual format continues to pose challenges for medical students. Applicants may benefit from the collective insight of the previous cycle's applicants when preparing for this upcoming interview season.

Previous research has shown that mock interviews can increase confidence and refine applicants' technique when preparing for residency interviews.² While there is abundant research on conducting in-person mock interviews,³⁻⁶ information on virtual mock interviews is lacking.

While many authors from varying academic backgrounds endorse the utility of mock interviews, there are several

barriers to coordinating and conducting an effective session. Frequently, interviews are conducted by faculty and senior residents; however, these individuals often have the busiest, most difficult schedules to coordinate. Furthermore, although faculty and senior residents have experience as interviewers in the last application cycle, they do not have experience as an interviewee during a virtual interview. These members of an academic otolaryngology department lack the interviewee experience and perspective when providing advice and mentorship for applicants in the coming match.

Current postgraduate year 1 (PGY1) residents offer unique insights based on their experience as the first to trial virtual interviews through the last application cycle. This 2021-2022 residency interview cycle, 3 of the authors (all PGY1 residents) offered a mock interview session to otolaryngology residency applicants. The method and proposed importance of this session are described in this article. To our knowledge, this is the first article describing a PGY1 resident-led virtual mock interview for otolaryngology residency applications.

Mock Interview Day

The structure of the mock interview was designed to simulate the typical virtual interview. Applicants were invited to participate 1 to 2 weeks prior to the selected date via email. On the interview day, applicants logged into a unique Zoom link at the start of the session and subsequently completed two 12-minute interviews with 2 PGY1 residents. Applicants were then given dedicated time with each of their interviewers for feedback (**Figure 1**).

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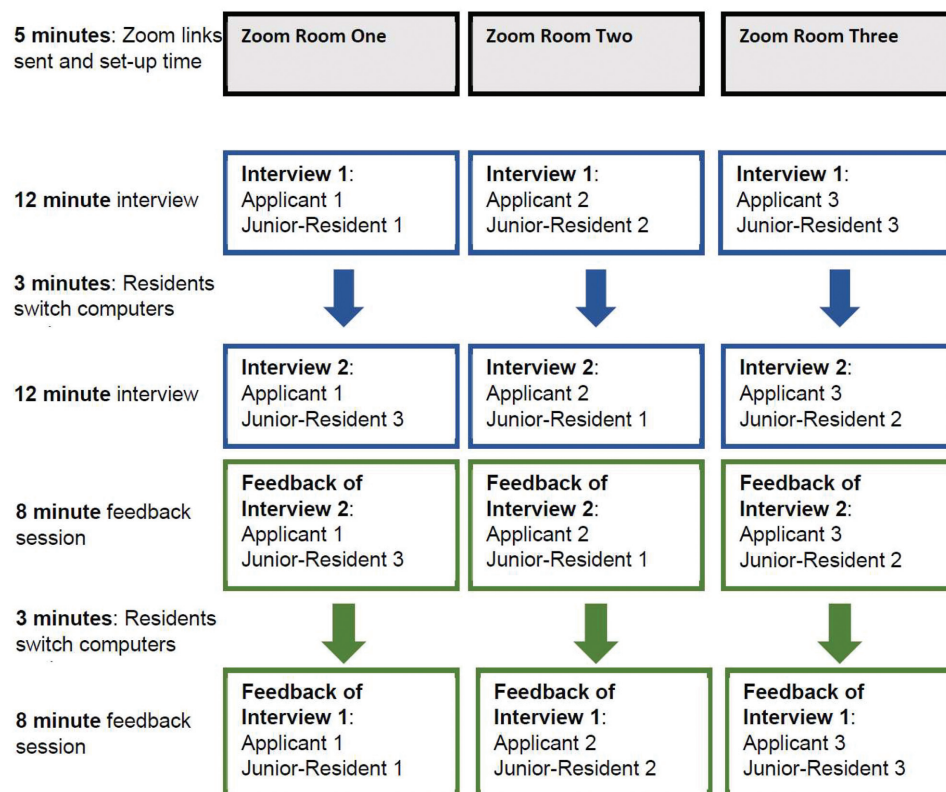


Figure 1. Schedule of 1-hour mock interview session with 3 applicants interviewing with 3 postgraduate year 1 residents.

Table 1. Questions Posed to Applicants During the Mock Interview Session.

Standard questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What makes you unique?
3. What are your hobbies?
4. What is your perspective on maintaining work-life balance?
5. Tell me about your research.

Trait questions

1. How would your best friend describe you?
2. What are your strengths?
3. How do you deal with criticism?
4. Describe the techniques you have used to learn/acquire new skills.

Scenario questions

1. Tell me about a time you failed.
2. Tell me about a time you made a mistake.

Questions were standardized so that applicants could practice a variety of question types that were commonly encountered during the 2020-2021 interview season (**Table 1**).

Discussion

Virtual mock interviews serve several purposes in preparing applicants for the virtual interview day. In developing this simulation session, we identified several objectives from our

own virtual interview experiences: presenting oneself on camera, simulation of the actual day, and managing unique stressors related to virtual interviews.

Insights From PGY1 Residents Shared With Mock Interviewees

During the feedback given to the simulation participants, we emphasized important lessons from the 2021 match cycle. There are significant differences in virtual interviewing compared to in-person interviewing, such as speaking to the camera instead of the screen to maintain eye contact and monitoring body language by changing camera angles. Feedback was provided to each applicant's background and camera setup.⁷

The mock interview day was made as realistic as possible. We felt it was important that applicants experience the disconcerting wait at their computers in the moments prior to the interview and understand relaxation techniques to use in this period. Some applicants experienced technological challenges and had to practice remaining calm while troubleshooting these issues or contacting the interview coordinator. Applicants must also be mentally prepared for the abrupt transition of one session ending and being connected to a different interview session.

In addition to virtual interviews, virtual social events can also be unique. Etiquette can vary during group socials, where applicants take turns interacting and speaking with panels of attendings or residents. Oftentimes, applicants will not be

invited to speak individually and will have to be aware of an appropriate time to share their insights and get noticed.

Applicants also experienced the beginning of Zoom fatigue. Extended periods on Zoom can result in exhaustion and inattention, which may be inadvertently misinterpreted as lack of interest in a residency program during an interview. The lack of in-person contact can make a successful interview feel indifferent and remote, resulting in a loss of confidence. During the feedback at the end of the simulation, applicants had an opportunity to decompress and then reflect after the period of intense focus. We emphasized to the applicants the importance of accepting past interviews, avoiding ruminating on poor answers, and practicing ongoing wellness activities. These activities can help applicants maintain a high level of performance throughout the interview season by showing energy, resilience and enthusiasm to each program.

PGY1 Resident Mentors

An additional benefit of PGY1 resident-led mock interviews is the opportunity to create relationships between applicants and PGY1 residents who are immediately senior to them and have just gone through this process. By establishing this connection, PGY1 residents can act as mentors at each stage of the application process. Hosting mock interviews with the entire first-year residency class not only reduces the workload on each resident but is also an excellent team-building exercise within their residency department.

Conclusion

Mock interviews are a necessary component of residency application interview preparation. PGY1 residents have unique and evaluable insights in preparing applicants for virtual interviews given their recent trial by fire with this new format. We recommend programs coordinate PGY1 resident-run mock interview sessions to help applicants prepare for the unique challenges of virtual residency interviews.

Author Contributions

Nicole Rose Blumenstein, substantial contributions to conception and design, drafted the article for important intellectual content, made final approval of the version to be published, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work; **David Mendel Bruss**, substantial contributions to conception and design, drafted the

article for important intellectual content, made final approval of the version to be published, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work; **Krystal Kan**, substantial contributions to conception and design, drafted the article for important intellectual content, made final approval of the version to be published, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work; **Jeffrey Yu**, substantial contributions to conception and design, drafted the article for important intellectual content, made final approval of the version to be published, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Disclosures

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