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The Impact of the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) Pandemic on the 2020 to 2021 Integrated Plastic Surgery Residency Cycle

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Sir,

It is with great pleasure that we had the opportunity to read the recently published Viewpoint entitled, “The Impact of the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) Pandemic on the 2020 to 2021 Integrated Plastic Surgery Residency Cycle.”¹ The authors should be applauded for their willingness to study the effects of the pandemic as they relate to pursuing a career in our specialty, as this can help identify areas of improvement for future years. However, the authors state that they are the first to study the impact of the pandemic and related uncertainties on the previous year’s integrated application cycle. Indeed, there are numerous publications within the plastic surgery literature on this topic, some of which include the same or similar ideas as discussed in this Viewpoint.

The changes in residency application process have been the topic of much discussion and investigation. We wish to review some specific, recent data prior to the publication of this Viewpoint, and do acknowledge that the timing of peer-review and publication in a rapidly changing environment during this pandemic may have been a factor. Specifically, the authors note that applicants experienced cancellations in USMLE Step 2 examinations and in subinternships at rates of 64% and 80%, respectively. Haley and colleagues, however, were the first to assess the impact among those interested in plastic surgery, and note cancellations of the same metrics at rates of 29% and 78%, respectively.² Their survey-based study was published in March of 2021, several months prior to the publication date of the Viewpoint on September 7th, 2021.

Further, the authors report the expectations and perceptions regarding the 2020-21 application cycle of both applicants and program directors, but do not describe the *impact* of COVID-19 on the cycle—only the perceptions prior to the cycle. Since Match Day 2021, several

publications have reported on the actual impact and effects of COVID-19 and virtual interviews. Notably, our group has reported on applicant preferences of specific aspects of virtual interviews,³ the program director perspective of virtual interviews,⁴ and an overview of our work that includes data from an additional accepted publication on the perceptions of applicants following the application cycle.⁵ These three references were published prior to September 7th, 2021, and focus upon characterizing impact on the application cycle rather than perceptions prior to the cycle.

ACCEPTED

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