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Medical Student Perceptions Comparing In-Person to Virtual Interviews in the Medical School Admissions Process

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Title: Medical Student Perceptions Comparing In-Person to Virtual Interviews in the Medical School Admissions Process

Background:

At Wayne State University School of Medicine (WSUSOM), prospective applicants are interviewed using three interview modalities: one faculty/alumni interview, one medical student interview, and five multiple-mini-interviews. Following COVID-19 induced institutional protocols, WSUSOM transitioned from in-person to a virtual format. In order to better understand how medical student interviewers viewed this transition, surveys were administered to those who experienced both in-person interviews (IPI) and virtual interviews (VI). The objective was to identify student perceptions of IPI and VI.

Methods:

This prospective, mixed methods study surveyed (n=24) and enrolled (n=10) medical student interviewers who conducted both IPI and VI. This included current medical students and medical graduates within the past year. Responses for preparation, preference, and evaluation and assessment were measured using a Likert scale from 1 (most negative) to 5 (most positive) as well as demographic data. Respondents described benefits and limitations using free text response. A two tailed, paired t-test was performed to compare group means obtained from virtual and in-person Likert scores.

Results:

Of the participants enrolled, 45% preferred IPI, 44% had no preference, and 11% preferred VI. The overall experience of VI compared to IPI was rated 4.20 and 4.50 respectively ($p=0.08$). The ability to assess applicant character was rated 3.33 and 4.00 for VI and IPI respectively ($p=0.01$). The ability to assess applicant emotional intelligence was rated 3.56 and 4.38 for VI and IPI respectively ($p=0.047$). Major themes identified during qualitative review for the benefit and limitations of: VI included convenience/flexibility and access to a quiet area, respectively. IPI included holistic evaluation and travel to the interview site.

Conclusion:

The medical student interviewers generally had no preference or preferred IPI over VI due to the benefits of IPI such as a better assessment of character and building rapport which was considered more significantly than the benefit of convenience in VI.