

Associate for Directors Radiation Oncology Program (ADROP) Statement on COVID-19 and the impact on Medical Students interested in Radiation Oncology

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting all areas of medicine, including training and education. As Program Directors, we have experienced the intense pressure affecting our colleagues in practice, the effects on our residents in training, as well as students interested in the field. The ripples of the pandemic wave are expected to continue through the 2020-21 application cycle and possibly beyond. We are writing this impact statement to address questions and lessen potential concerns of interested students as they consider the field.

1. **How can I learn more about the specialty?** Prior to the pandemic, many students encountered Radiation Oncology serendipitously, often through a patient that required oncologic care or a family member that received treatment. This led to an exploration of the field during medical school and eventual away rotations at other institutions. With medical student education shifting off campus and away rotations currently on hold, the traditional options for radiation oncology experience are less available. However, there are other good options:
 - a. **Mentorship:** If your school doesn't have a department, one of our colleagues, Dr. Sabin Motwani (@sabinwomtanimd), has curated a list of Radiation Oncologists who are happy to mentor med students: <https://bit.ly/3eY4xPa>
 - b. **Advice and Advocacy:** Our field is fortunate to have a dynamic and engaged resident-led group, the Association of Residents in Radiation Oncology. Their website has news, educational resources and various ways to connect to their association: <https://bit.ly/3cTMJms>
 - c. **Online resources:** Perhaps the best is curated by Radiation Oncology Education Collaborative Study Group (ROECG): <https://bit.ly/3cX2rgQ>
 - d. **Twitter:** Several faculty in both academics and private practice maintain active twitter profiles that can be used to follow discussions and ask questions. A hashtag ontology curated by Dr. Matt Katz (@subatomicdoc) can help guide you: <https://bit.ly/3cWU2db>
 - e. **Virtual rotations:** [Programs are beginning to design and implement virtual rotations in Radiation Oncology. These may be available inside your institution or as virtual rotations at outside institutions.](#)

2. **Published research in the field has been important to matching. Will that change?** PD's always like to see publications on subjects in their field. It speaks to both interest in the specialty itself, and the ability to take on and complete projects. The pandemic has thrown many wrenches into the gears, including research projects. However, you can show your dedication to oncology and cancer research by engaging with mentors and establishing relationships within the field (see above). Your application cohort will be facing similar challenges, and PD expectations will adjust to our current climate.

3. **Away rotations may be canceled. How would that affect my application?** Away rotations serve several purposes: 1) They give students a chance to see the field from a different vantage point than a home department provides. 2) They demonstrate an applicant's commitment to the specialty. 3) They show an away program your clinical skills (aka audition rotations). 4) They can be a source of Letters of Recommendation (LoRs). In the Covid-era, gaining a different perspective and demonstrating a commitment to the specialty can be achieved by engaging the community, vis a vis items provided above. Regarding LoR's, PD's will take into account the limited options available to medical students this year and more highly consider the non-RadOnc LoR's coming from the student's home institution. Clinical excellence in your rotations at your home institution should be your priority.

4. **USMLE Step 2 and COMPLEX level 2 exams are delayed. Should I worry?** Don't worry. Those exams will be required for your eventual licensure, but PDs will not be expecting them on the same schedule that they had received them previously.

The importance of radiation oncology to cancer patients has never been more salient than during this pandemic. The work we do for cancer patients is urgent and non-elective, and most radiation oncologists have remained busy at work despite the changes to many other outpatient specialties. We look forward to an outstanding residency class applying in 2020-21. Please reach out to us through Twitter or email if we can provide you with any advice or direction.

Sincerely,

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