



CFMS Member Memo to Class 2021 Re: Visiting Electives and 2021 R1 Match

Dear Students,

We hope everyone is doing well as things start returning to the “new normal”. We are glad to see many of you returning to clerkship with many more to follow in the coming weeks. We hope everyone has been staying well and safe.

We wanted to send an update after the decisions that were formally announced today regarding visiting electives. In addition, we address what progress has been made on R1 match timelines and processes.

Visiting Electives Decision:

Earlier today, the AFMC officially announced a board decision regarding visiting electives for the class of 2021.

The decision is as follows:

*At the AFMC Board meeting June 16, 2020, the Board approved that that there will be **no visiting electives** for the Class of 2021 for the duration of the 20-21 academic year.*

- a) Any exceptions (where there is no ability to provide a particular clinical experience in the home school) will be considered by the AFMC Committee on Undergraduate Education on a case by case basis.*
- b) This policy does not apply to core rotations which are completed outside of the home schools*

Please see the [Learner News Release](#)

Further Details:

The Learner News update was released to provide more information and context to why the decision was made. We have included some of the text with further context here:

Extensive discussions and consultations were held and multiple factors were considered in the process of making the decision to stop visiting electives for the Class of 2021. Factors that were considered include the ongoing uncertainty as to the evolution of the pandemic; public health measures that vary greatly by province, region and hospital; and the limited (or non-existent) capacity of schools to welcome visiting students. This decision was not taken lightly and the education leadership is aware and acknowledges the impact it may have on some students.

Our Advocacy/Further Context:

Firstly, as the undergraduate medical education (UGME) programs worked to re-develop clerkship schedules we advocated to ensure that sufficient pre-CaRMS application deadline elective time would be preserved in the schedules.

Over the last few months, we have continued to advocate to the UGME deans and all others involved in clinical learning that students highly value visiting electives for career exploration. In the context of not having in-person interviews this year, we emphasized the importance of exploring all options to be able to offer visiting electives. We brainstormed creative ways that we thought we might be able to facilitate visiting electives even in situations with strict provincial quarantines still being in place. We also asked about the possibility of delaying the decision to better understand how the pandemic was evolving.



The UGME Deans were very receptive to our advocacy and they have also been hoping to offer visiting electives as they understand the importance of them. Unfortunately due to a number of reasons including limited capacity at training sites, ongoing strict public health measures that are different between provinces, uncertainty surrounding the pandemic and most importantly equity (the importance of making a uniform decision so that a school or province's schools wasn't significantly advantaged or disadvantaged), it was deemed that at this time schools could not offer visiting electives for the rest of the 2020-2021 academic year. Some of you may be wondering why they had to decide now instead of waiting to see how the pandemic further evolved. Deciding now allows you to meet with Student Affairs and career counselling to re-organize your elective and match strategy earlier rather than later. This also is a clear uniform message to program directors of residency programs that learners will be entering the match without visiting electives this year, thus there need to be some adjustments to their application requirements and expectations. Further, it was generally felt that if anything, capacity may decrease depending on when and how a second wave may present itself and how that would affect elective surgeries and outpatient clinics. In addition, the strict travel regulations (e.g. no viral symptoms at all on flights) and potential that electives need to be cancelled on short notice due to the evolving pandemic make it risky to move forward with visiting electives. If students are booking electives and then they are cancelled on short notice, you would be severely disadvantaged in obtaining another elective, even at your home school. This could have effects on meeting graduation and curriculum requirements.

The following information was included in the additional Learner news update. These are meant to answer some additional questions you may have:

- 1. There will be no change to the electives diversification policy which states that a student may do a maximum of 8 weeks of electives in any one PGY 1 entry discipline.*
- 2. Exceptions will be considered for visiting electives when a home school cannot provide any clinical experience in a specific discipline. For example, school X is in a region that does not have any plastic surgeons. All patients with plastic surgery issues have to be transferred to a different region for management. Student A is interested in plastic surgery as a career. Consideration would be given for student A to do a visiting elective in plastic surgery at a different centre.*
- 3. There are students in the class of 2021 who have already completed either one or more visiting electives due to the structure of the curriculum at their school. The AFMC resident Match Committee Subcommittee on Applications and File Review is considering that reference letters from visiting electives cannot be a requirement for residency application.*
- 4. Unsanctioned electives (weekend visits, observerships, virtual electives) will not be allowed.*
- 5. The Virtual Interview and Program Recruitment Subcommittee will make recommendations how programs can showcase themselves to students. All programs are being encouraged to find innovative ways to meet applicants virtually and showcase themselves.*

Our Advocacy/Further Context:

As noted above, the 8 week electives “cap” will remain in place. You can do up to 8 weeks of electives in one PGY-1 entry route discipline.

Specifics around point #3 continue to be further discussed and we have more updates on this below.

Please note point #4: UGME, Student Affairs and the CFMS are all aligned in our advocacy that additional “unsanctioned site visits” should not be allowed. These “site visits” place you at significant risk since you are not protected by any liability insurance if it is not an official elective. Additional travel this year may place you at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 and this promotes inequity, as some students will have



more ability and/or access to site visits than others. Residency programs and postgraduate medical education deans are informed of this and residency programs should not be offering informal site visits.

Additional AFMC Learner News Updates:

In an effort to improve communication and ensure the learner organizations (CFMS, FMEQ), UGME deans, Student Affairs deans and Postgraduate Deans as well as the AFMC are communicating the same information we have been releasing “Learner News” updates. These are jointly written by all of the stakeholders mentioned above. We know that this is a very stressful time for everyone and the goal of these joint communications is for you to hear one “source of truth” from all major stakeholders in our medical education that includes the learner perspective.

- [May 11th](#)
- [May 18th](#)
- [June 2nd](#)

We want to highlight a few points below. The exact text from the learner news updates have been quoted in *italics* and additional context, commentary and our advocacy points are noted in normal text.

Return to Clerkship:

Many of you have started returning to clerkship. We have been hearing positive feedback in general about the returns. Obviously, the clinical environment looks very different now than it did in March and we know some rotations are still not running at even close to capacity. All of the UGME deans, clerkship directors and administrators have been working extremely hard to adjust things on short notice. We will be looking to collect feedback on everyone’s learning experiences so far through our Academic and Presidents’ roundtables, which you local medical societies all have representation at.

“Students at several schools have now been able to return to clerkship. We have heard that this has gone well. More students will continue to return over the next weeks, as local conditions allow. There is ongoing collaboration nationally within Undergraduate Deans, Student Affairs Deans, clerkship directors, and clinical skills directors. Everyone is working incredibly hard to optimize student experiences within the reality that certain decisions around clerkship rotations need to be made in the context of local restrictions”

One of the 10 principles that was passed by the AFMC on “Medical Education during COVID-19 Pandemic” is that learner health and safety be prioritized and learners must have access to PPE. If for any reason, you find yourself in a situation where PPE is not available to you, or you are being told you need to buy essential PPE, please let your MedSocs know and we will assist you in advocacy. If you are ever asked to see patients with viral symptoms (or those who are on other precautions) and do not have access to the proper PPE, you have the right to raise this to your preceptors, and, for your safety, to not see these patients until you are provided the necessary PPE.

2021 Match:

As you all know, major changes were made to the 2021 R1 Match timeline, with applications being due Feb.7th 2021 and the second iteration match day being no later than May 18th 2021.

The AFMC board also announced the decision that all interviews for the R1 match this year would be done virtually.



What has been happening since?

Processes work has started on developing and streamlining processes for Match 2021 based on the new timelines.

Three subcommittees of the AFMC Resident Match Committee have been created and tasked with developing the processes for Match 2021.

The ARMC is a committee (that predates COVID 19) comprised of representatives from the AFMC committees of Undergraduate Deans, Postgraduate Deans, Student Affairs Deans, AFMC Board members, learner organizations (CFMS, FMEQ, RDoC, FMRQ), and CaRMS.

There is representation from student organizations on the first 2 sub committees below, and in fact the Virtual Interview subcommittee is co-chaired by the president of CFMS.

The subcommittees are:

- 1. Applications and File Review Sub-Committee whose mandate is to make recommendations related to application content and quality, and the file review process*
- 2. Virtual Interview and Program Recruitment Sub-Committee whose mandate is to make recommendations on the virtual interview processes, how to best communicate with applicants; and how applicants can promote themselves to programs.*
- 3. Technical Sub-Committee whose mandate will be to consider opportunities for simplification of requirements for the match run, improvements in processes for provision of files and Rank Order Lists; and, streamlining technology around interface between CaRMS/PG offices/Program Offices*

Significant work has started on the logistics around the match process. These subcommittees as well as the UGME and SA deans amongst other groups have continued to discuss the logistics of the match. We are working quickly and efficiently.

Subcommittee #1: The Applications and File Review Sub-committee is discussing the application requirements for your R1 residency match. They are reviewing a number of things including MSPRs and reference letters. The subcommittee is considering what adjustments may need to be made to the application requirements for this year given the unique challenges that the COVID pandemic has posed. Rishi Sharma, our Director of Education represents the CFMS on this subcommittee.

Subcommittee #2: Virtual Interview and Program Promotion Sub-committee has a two-fold mandate. The first is to make recommendations on how programs and applicants can promote each other during the period before CaRMS applications are due. Given the decision announced regarding visiting electives, this is even more important. We know that some residency programs have already started to hold virtual info nights and other activities to engage with 2021s. We want to provide equity of access and opportunity for both programs and applicants to be able to employ virtual methods of exploring whether a program may be a good fit for you to pursue residency training in. Secondly, the group will make recommendations for how a virtual interviews process that aligns with the [Best Practices in Applications and Selection \(BPAS\) report](#). The subcommittee is co-chaired by Victor Do, CFMS President.

Subcommittee #3: Is tasked with more logistical/technical tasks such as assessing how to improve the ability of programs to get information directly from the CaRMS application portal etc. They are also working through the exact time required for certain parts of the match (e.g. running the match algorithm), with a goal to compress as much as possible, while maintaining integrity of process. The work from this group will help us set additional dates in the R1 match timeline that have not yet been finalized (e.g. first iteration match day)



Advisory Group:

The CFMS has struck an advisory group amongst with class 2021 representatives (either your class reps, former MedSoc presidents) from each of our 15 member schools to get continued feedback to inform the work we are doing on the subcommittees and any other consultation that is done. The representatives on this advisory group as well as your MedSoc leadership will liaise and consult with you on a regular basis.

Mental Health and Wellness:

Adapting to all the changes that have come with this year is very stressful. Especially for the class of 2021 we know you have had so many changes already this year and this has had a significant effect on your career planning, education and overall wellbeing. Please know we are all here to support you, the faculties, the CFMS, and your peers/colleagues in medicine.

There will be new stresses as the medical education system pivots to a “new normal”. We would like to re-iterate that there are a number of local and national resources available if students find that they are having difficulties adapting to new challenges. The Student Affairs offices at each university are well prepared to help. As a profession we always need reminding that we need to remain professional and that there are support systems to help us cope with frustration and anxiety. Reaching out for support is sign of strength.

We know the news today is not what you would have hoped for. Given all the challenges and significant changes you as 2021s have already had to endure, we know this may be difficult news to process and that it likely significantly effects your plans for the year. Your Student Affairs and UGME offices are here to support you.

The CFMS will continue to advocate on your behalf nationally. We will be consulting with the 2021 advisory group and where needed do additional outreach and consultation.

As always if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at president@cfms.org

Sincerely,

Victor Do
MD, Class 2020, University of Alberta
CFMS President, 2019-2020