

A Need for Collaborative Studies of GME Interview Software

Regarding the article published by Hern et al,¹ entitled “Residency Applicant Preferences of Online Systems for Scheduling Interviews,” we strongly support online interview-scheduling systems and research aimed at assessing their value. It was not unexpected (yet reassuring) that applicants found these systems beneficial.

The authors stated that their primary aim was to “measure [emergency medicine] applicant satisfactions and perceived time savings using a commercially available Internet scheduling program,” which is identified in the Methods section as Interview Broker. Hern et al evaluated only 1 particular product in their article.

As educational research is still adapting to the rigors and benchmarks of clinical investigations, we feel that a litmus test should be applied to identify studies that could be perceived as advertisements, in an effort to maintain the integrity of graduate medical education (GME) as a whole. For example, it is atypical that specific mention of the Interview Broker product, opposed to the generic “online scheduling system,” extends beyond the Methods section. The Discussion section touts Interview Broker versus absence of an online scheduling system, even going so far as to label the 2 study groups “Use of Interview Broker” versus “No Use of Interview Broker.” Finally, the software used to conduct the study’s survey was not specified. It is unclear if Interview Broker’s internal survey feature was utilized for survey distribution. This may represent another potential unreported bias.

To broaden the dialogue for *Journal of Graduate Medical Education* readers, a thorough discussion could have included mention of key competitors in the online scheduling software market, such as Thalamus,² a software system developed by the authors of this letter, and the Electronic Residency Application Service.³ Hern et al noted that it is “not

clear how many programs are currently using online interview tools”; however, the Thalamus website currently lists dissemination at more than 100 institutions nationally. While we believe in the good intentions of the authors, a more generic discussion would have appeared less like free advertising for a particular product.

We recommend that the GME community initiate collaborative studies, utilizing multiple online scheduling software products, to help assess the value of each product—including additional features for scheduling interviews, such as report/data generation, automated correspondence, mobile interface, applicant surveys, scoring algorithm management, and ranking. Such software not only possesses the potential to streamline the interview scheduling process, but also to utilize analytics and big data to further optimize the process to benefit applicants, residency/fellowship programs, and the GME community.

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Editor’s Note: Both authors are the cofounders, majority owners, and executive leaders of Thalamus, a graduate medical education interview scheduling software and management platform.