Letter to the Editor

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Cost of medical student virtual conference registration in ophthalmology and urology during the COVID-19 pandemic

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To the Editor:

We read with interest “Analyzing the Cost of Medical Student Virtual Conference Registration by Specialty During the COVID-19 Pandemic” [1] by Veyg and Gurvich, and commend them for their research analyzing the cost of medical student virtual conference registration by specialty during the COVID-19 pandemic. In their study, they found that “research intensive” specialties tend to have higher conference attendance fees, which may result in repulsing students with a lack of resources or funds from attending those conferences and establishing crucial networks with doctors within their respective fields [1].

In an effort add to their research, we compared the costs of virtual conferences to research output by students matching into ophthalmology and urology. Because the SF Match does not make this information readily available, we found studies and surveys published within the last 5 years. While recent studies do not analyze all research accomplishments, such as presentations, Bargoud et al. reported that the average publication number of all successfully matched ophthalmology residents was 1.23 ± 0.01 in 2018 [2]. The number of publications has increased in recent years. Srinivasan et al. found the average number of publications of successfully matched residents was 2.95 ± 0.33 for the class of 2022 in their

recent analysis of the top 30 ophthalmology residency programs in the United States [3]. Additionally, a 2018 study found that 99% of all ophthalmology applicants had at least one publication [4]. Urology had a similar average number of publications among successfully matched residents in the top 50 residency programs at 2.38 ± 4.19 in 2020 [5]. Urology also demonstrates higher interview rates among applicants with more research experiences [6].

Although the SF Match does not publicize average research accomplishments of candidates, it can be determined that ophthalmology and urology are “research intensive” specialties based on average publications among applicants in recent research. The conference fee for student members of the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) is \$75 (Figure 1) and there is no option for non-member student attendance [7]. Fees for the annual urology conference are \$50 and \$100 for American Urological Association (AUA) student members and non-member students, respectively (Figure 1) [8]. These findings only include basic virtual conference fees without upgrades.

Although research intensive specialties were found to have higher fees for conference attendance, ophthalmology and urology conferences have fees that more similarly resemble fees for members of non-research-intensive specialties. Despite having lower conference registration fees than other “research intensive” specialties, we agree that free conference registration would help reduce the financial burden on already indebted medical students. Lastly, we invite the SF match to publish transparent metrics that differentiate the research experiences of recently matched residents.

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Figure 1: Ophthalmology and urology national conference attendance fees for student members compared to the average national conference attendance fees, discovered by Veyg and Gurevich [1], for student members of “research intensive” and “non-research intensive” specialties during the COVID-19 pandemic. * Data collected by Veyg and Gurevich [1].

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