THE AMERICAN ORTHOPAEDIC ASSOCIATION®

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AOA/CORD RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES

Signaling for the 2020-21 Match Cycle

As we enter into the 2020-21 Application and Match Cycle for medical students applying to ACGME accredited Orthopaedic Surgery Residency Programs, there have been rapid changes and innovations introduced to try and help students and programs navigate this strange time. One of the ideas that has been under active discussion by program directors across specialties is the idea of a "signaling system."

This concept has been previously published in orthopaedic literature[1], so the idea is not novel to discussion by orthopaedic program directors and CORD. As a community of program directors, we are concerned that this system has not been properly vetted or designed for immediate implementation in the current interview cycle.

It has come to our attention that there are companies supporting this token process that will be charging applicants directly. Without 100% buy-in from programs, which will be challenging with this short timeline, there is concern that this may be an added expense to applicants without a proof of concept.

We are also aware the otolaryngology programs are planning to pilot a signaling program. If it is approved and implemented, we will be eager to see the results of that collaboration as a future model.

We recognize some potential benefits of an applicant being able to signal programs perceived to be the best "fit" for the student, and for programs being able to focus on those applicants who have recognized them with a token. But we anticipate significant confusion among applicants and advisors about how to best strategize "token" choice as well as among programs about how to interpret being chosen as a token program and the inferred obligations therein (i.e. is there an expectation of a guaranteed interview from use of a token?)

Without doubt, AOA/CORD is concerned about the unnecessary volume of residency applications and the stress residency applicants experience during the application cycle, but we think a signaling or token program is not the answer to this problem at this time.

For the current cycle, it is the recommendation of AOA/CORD that the signaling system discussed has excellent intent but its functionality is not proven; therefore, we are not recommending its use for programs and students in the current application cycle.

1. Bernstein J. Not the Last Word: Want to Match in an Orthopaedic Surgery Residency? Send a Rose to the Program Director. *Clin Orthop Relat Res*. 2017;475(12):2845-2849. doi:10.1007/s11999-017-5500-9

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