

Professional experiences of international medical graduates (IMGs) during the COVID19 pandemic

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BACKGROUND

- International medical graduates (IMGs) make up a large portion of the physician workforce and play a critical role in the US healthcare system.
- This study aims to explore how the COVID19 pandemic has uniquely impacted the professional experiences of IMGs. We hope this work will aid residency programs in their support of IMGs who may have faced challenges during the COVID19 pandemic.

METHODS

- Recruited fifteen international medical graduate resident physicians of diverse national origin (see Figure 1) and varying specialties at a mid-Atlantic healthcare system volunteered to participate in the study from 2020 to 2021
- We stopped recruiting when the data reached theoretical saturation.
- Semi-structured, one-to-one, virtual interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed from a constructivist paradigm using thematic analysis.

RESULTS

- Non-US-born IMGs faced unique challenges during the pandemic. Three themes (see quotes in Figure 2) emerged from the thematic analysis:
 - (1) Professional development opportunities to support IMGs' candidacy for residency and fellowship were limited during the pandemic; participants noted that decreased opportunities for in-person networking, cancelled away rotations, and increased application volume made it more challenging to match into a program.
 - (2) IMGs who were concerned about the wellness of their family abroad faced additional stressors due to COVID19 travel and visa restrictions.
 - (3) IMGs described experiencing profound social isolation due to lack of a social support network in US; some expressed a need for programs to connect IMGs with one another virtually.

IMG REGION OF ORIGIN

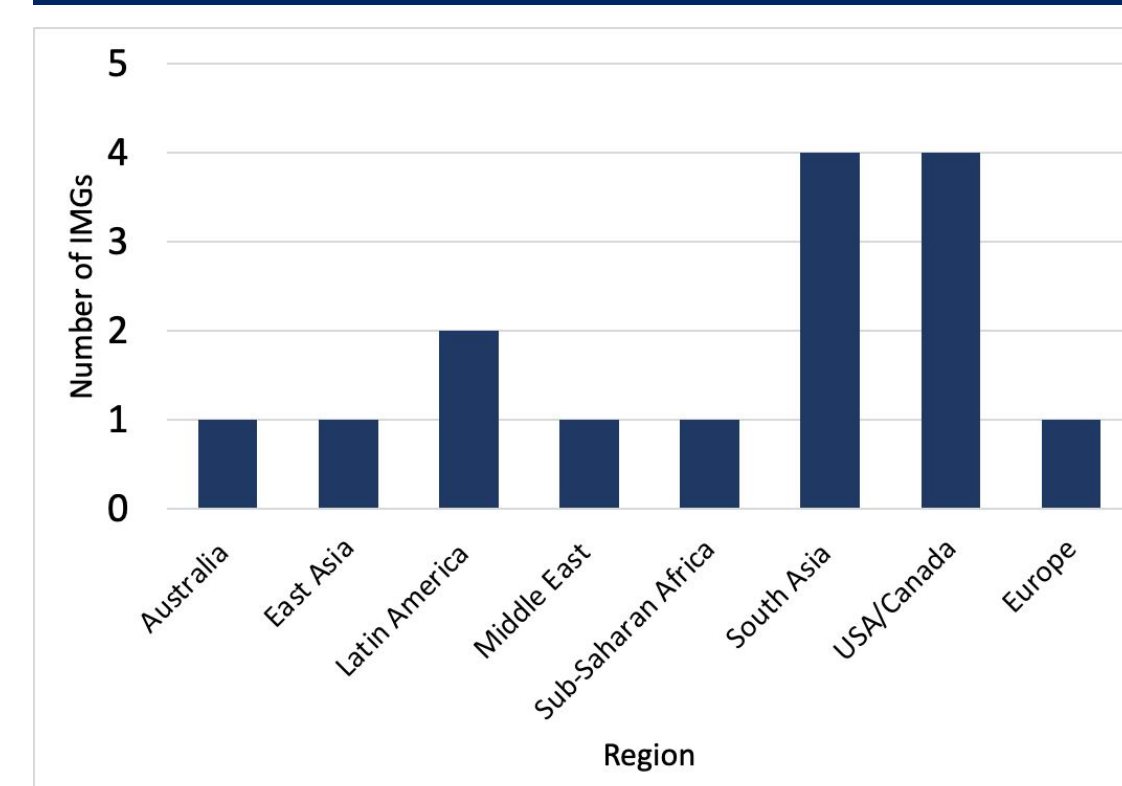


Figure 1. Geographic origins of IMG participants

PARTICIPANT QUOTES

"They [residency programs] got a lot of applications because nobody had to travel this year, and everything was on Zoom. So, the job markets right now in COVID are not great."

"I think it was hard to not have the initial activities that go through the beginning of residency...I didn't even get to meet my whole class at once because we couldn't be together. There are some people in my program I have never seen before."

"Not being able to visit their [IMGs with families abroad] families is a big risk factor for burnout as well as depression."

Figure 2. Quotes pulled from interview transcripts: IMG participants reflecting on COVID19's impact on their experience during residency

DISCUSSION

- The COVID19 pandemic has meaningful implications on the professional development and wellness of IMGs.
- Programs should use these identified themes to support IMGs' residency and fellowship candidacy as well as their wellbeing.
- Cultivating an environment that supports the specific needs of IMGs will develop a diverse and inclusive physician workforce and promote wellness and resilience while preventing burnout.

NEXT STEPS

- Conduct additional interviews with IMG residents to follow up on how the progression of the pandemic has impacted their professional experiences over the course the last 2 years and elucidate any long term implications on their professional development and wellbeing at present and going forward.

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