



AASLD Trainee Webinar Q&A

EDUCATION QUESTIONS

What are some ways in which fellows can stay proactive about their learning experiences during the pandemic?

Trainees have a variety of different opportunities available for learning during the pandemic. Social media has emerged as a unique source of education for trainees. In the hepatology #livertwitter community, several structured conversations now occur through @GIJournal, an online journal club that reviews recently published peer-reviewed journal articles in GI/hepatology, and through #tweetorials, or short tutorials on specific hepatology topics. While some of these conversations occur “live,” they are permanently available for trainee review and can be accessed on any mobile device. Additionally, as a result of the pandemic, the Liver Fellow Network (@LiverFellow) was recently started by several GI and hepatology fellows to provide a collaborative online learning series to facilitate learning and engagement among trainees interested in hepatology. Podcasts and evidence-based topic reviews can be found online at liverfellow.org. Trainees can also join the larger hepatology community by participating in webinars held by AASLD that review relevant topics directed towards practicing hepatologists. These online learning programs are often available on demand to accommodate complexities in trainee schedules. At the institutional level, many programs have transitioned their in-person formal conferences to virtual-based learning sessions. These include departmental grand rounds, pathology conferences, liver transplant selection committee meetings, fellows teaching courses, and Morbidity and Mortality conferences. The online, virtual format allows for greater accessibility and flexibility to attend conferences during busy trainee clinical rotations.

How can fellows take advantage of new avenues for learning (i.e. the use of telehealth) on outpatient rotations?

One welcome change in clinical practice brought about by the pandemic has been the widespread adoption of telehealth technology. Telemedicine has provided trainees with the ability to continue inpatient and outpatient consultative care which is of critical importance to gain the necessary cognitive skills required to practice independently. It has provided trainees exposure to these new technological platforms as an alternative means of providing care. Along with established hepatology providers, trainees will learn how to incorporate telehealth into their future practices and gain an understanding of the nuances of telehealth billing and reimbursement. Trainees and their training programs will need to work together to create efficient systems for virtually “staffing” patients, i.e. having trainees independently formulate patient diagnostic and management plans to present to the attending for review.

WELLNESS QUESTIONS

What are some steps that hepatology and GI training programs can take to maintain trainee well-being during COVID-19?

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to take a toll on the well-being of trainees, and GI/hepatology trainees who already have rigorous, time-intensive schedules, may be at greater risk of experiencing stress and burnout. During the pandemic, trainees are now facing even greater workplace hardships, moral dilemmas, and in many places, risks to their own safety, all of which are likely to exacerbate existing levels of burnout and related mental health issues. GI and transplant hepatology fellowship programs will need to pay particular attention to providing resources to support the health and wellness of their trainees. Strategies include maintaining open lines of communication, managing expectations, checking in frequently to monitor and promote well-being, and creating a supportive and blame-free work culture.

What can trainees do maintain their well-being during COVID-19?

As trainees, it is important to speak up to your programs about your experiences and seek help when needed. Outside of work, it is vital to create space to care for oneself amidst the increased professional demands, maintain communication with loved ones and colleagues, and ensure that basic needs are being met (eating regularly, getting a full night of restful sleep, continuing exercise routine, engaging in meditation or mindfulness). Online meditation and mindfulness programs such as Headspace are currently offering free memberships to health care workers.

JOB QUESTIONS

What are some ways that new fellows can learn more about other programs during the virtual interview process (for either transplant hepatology fellowship programs or jobs)?

The loss of in-person interviews will impact how applicants learn about a program (and city) and may create more challenges in evaluating an institution and hospital for compatibility. It will also be difficult to know whether a city is livable for an applicant and their family, and trainees may feel less inclined to move to new cities that are less familiar to them. Programs and applicants will need to be creative and utilize other available resources to adopt to these new hurdles. For example, many programs have increased their online and social media presence to highlight the program's culture, including social activities and relationships among fellows and faculty. Trainees should utilize all of these available online resources to learn about each program. Individual virtual interviews and program overview sessions on the interview day should also be utilized by applicants to learn more about a program's culture without being able to explore it in person.

What advice do you have for fellows looking for a job?

While the demand for hepatologists remains high, it is important to understand that your first job after finishing fellowship may not be the “perfect job”. It is therefore critical to determine what your priorities in your first job will be; protected time, research infrastructure, location, or the needs of your family. In addition, if there is a particular institution or location you are interested in, it is important to be persistent at these institutions. Trainees should let a program know they are interested even if a position is not currently available so they can be considered if a position opens.

Has the pandemic-related decline in revenue across GI divisions impacted the ability to hire new hepatologists?

In general, although divisional revenues have fallen, the need for hepatologists remains high. Particularly, as the field is primarily office-based and therefore easily adaptable to telemedicine, hepatologists have maintained their ability to care for patients. Additionally, as liver transplantation is a lifesaving intervention as opposed to an elective procedure, transplant centers have either not generally seen a reduction or are now back to baseline in the number of transplants performed.

Do you have any recommendations about how trainees can connect with faculty at other institutions now that the Liver Meeting is no longer an in-person meeting?

One suggestion is to reach out to faculty members at institutions where you are interested in working. A good place to start is mentors and local faculty, who can reach out to their colleagues at other transplant centers about their needs for a transplant hepatologist. Although the liver meeting is virtual, it still provides a great opportunity to network. For instance, while virtually meeting with prospective employers, you can discuss the sessions you have visited and enjoyed and use discussions regarding common clinical or research interests as a segue to inquiring about job opportunities.

What networking opportunities are available for fellows during the AASLD Digital Liver Meeting (TLMdX)?

There will be a variety of virtual meeting rooms to enable networking with colleagues. Each special interest group will have a virtual lounge which members can enter. In addition, there will be an opportunity to arrange a 1:1 virtual meeting with other members. Here are the list of different resources that will be available for early career attendees during TLMdX.

1. Early Career Investigators Booth in the AASLD Resource Center
2. Early Career Investigators Video Networking Lounge in the TLMdX Networking & Engagement Center
3. A group of discussion boards including:
 - a. AASLD Foundation & Awards
 - b. 15 Special Interest Topics
 - c. Career Development & Mentorship
 - d. COVID-19 & the Liver
 - e. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
 - f. Early Career Investigators
 - g. Global
 - h. Hepatology Associates
 - i. Patients & Advocates
 - j. Women in Hepatology