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Commentary

Dermatology Interest Groups in Medical Schools

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Abstract

Involvement in a Dermatology Interest Group (DIG) allows students to learn about dermatology, partake in service projects, get involved in research, and ask questions about the application process for residency programs. In this article, we review the activities and member involvement of DIGs from 11 medical schools. To our knowledge, this is the first descriptive analysis of DIGs across the United States. This comparison of DIGs is not only potentially helpful for medical schools interested in establishing a DIG, but it also offers insight into how previously established DIGs could improve and have a greater impact both in individual medical schools and in the community at-large.

Key words: Dermatology, medical students, interest group

Introduction

Recently, the importance of interest groups in medical schools has been discussed. Articles about interest groups in radiology [1], obstetrics and gynecology [2], emergency medicine [3], oncology [4], and surgery [5, 6] have highlighted the benefits of such organizations. Not only can interest groups attract top students to certain fields, but they also allow students to establish relationships with mentors and learn more about medical specialties. Mentoring programs for medical students provide several benefits, including increased thought about career choices, enhanced research productivity, and improved academic performance [7].

However, the literature on the role of dermatology interest groups (DIGs) is relatively sparse. To our knowledge, there are three articles that specifically discuss DIGs, in reference to an online blog used by the University of Texas Medical Branch DIG [8, 9, 10]. Students have utilized this blog as they consider a career in dermatology and apply for residency.

An enhanced understanding of DIGs would be of value owing to the increasingly competitive nature of achieving a dermatology residency. Out of all residency applicants, matched dermatology applicants have the second highest average United States Medical Licensing Examination Step 1 scores, second only to applicants in Otolaryngology [11]. Dermatology applicants also typically partake in research and community service projects. In 2014, 2.33% of U.S. seniors match into dermatology in the US [11].

Herein, authors have provided the following summaries of the annual activities of DIGs at their respective institutions. [Table 1](#) serves as a tool to compare the 11 institutions. Our aim is to provide constructive ideas in order to increase the impact of DIGs as a whole.

Table 1. A comparison of 11 DIGs

School	City and state	Number of active members	Dermatology Residency Program	Number matched in dermatology in 2015	Most valuable aspect of DIG	Areas for improvement
Baylor COM	Houston, TX	29	Yes	6	Residency application advice	More mentorship, research opportunities, and education
Creighton University SOM	Omaha, NE and Pheonix, AZ	Phoenix: 6 Omaha: 12	No	0	Mentorship	More research opportunities and community service
Medical College of Georgia – Augusta University	Augusta, GA	Unknown	Yes	2	Learning about the field of dermatology	More frequent meetings and research opportunities
Michigan State University College of Human Medicine	Grand Rapids, MI and East Lansing, MI	Grand Rapids: 8	No	3	Mentorship	Faculty involvement

Oklahoma University COM	Oklahoma City, OK	25	Yes	5	Mentorship	Faculty involvement
Perelman SOM, University of Pennsylvania	Philadelphia, PA	29	Yes	6	Unknown	Unknown
State University of New York - Stony Brook University SOM	Stony Brook, NY	30	Yes	3	Mentorship	More frequent meetings
Texas A&M COM	College Station, Dallas, Houston, Austin and Temple TX	15	Yes	2	Mentorship	More research opportunities
University of Colorado SOM	Aurora, CO	Unknown	Yes	1	Unknown	Unknown
University of Florida COM	Gainesville, FL	25	Yes	4	Mentorship	More career guidance and community service
University of Texas Medical Branch SOM	Galveston, TX	20	Yes	4	Research opportunities and mentorship	Increased involvement with dermatology programs in other cities in Texas

Involvement in Dermatology Interest Groups

At Baylor University School of Medicine (SOM), there are one to three DIG meetings per semester. Topics include how to write a research paper, the application process, and basic topics in dermatology. In addition, there have been workshops on suturing and lasers in dermatology. Members have participated in a race benefiting melanoma research and they are beginning a sun exposure education program at local schools.

At Creighton University SOM, students either complete clinical rotations in Omaha, Nebraska or in Phoenix, Arizona. Within the DIGs in both cities, members typically meet twice per year to discuss the application process. The Phoenix branch has started to provide education to hair stylists and massage therapists about skin cancer lesions, as well as education about sun protection in local schools. The two branches hold meetings at the same time and utilize speaker phone to better communicate.

At the Medical College of Georgia – Augusta University, there are two to four meetings per year that focus on a presentation given by the Chief of Dermatology or a resident, which outlines dermatologic cases. Other presentations highlight a “day in the life of a dermatologist.” The DIG has also created a poster for skin cancer awareness, which was presented at a local health fair. They plan to use this poster at future events.

The DIG at Michigan State University College of Human Medicine began with a small group of students interested in the field. Students participated in bi-monthly melanoma tumor board meetings with local dermatologists, surgical oncologists, and dermatopathologists. The group also held journal clubs to discuss dermatologic research. For the past three years, DIG students have participated in a Grand Rapids citywide event called the Gran Fondo, a cycle event aimed at raising awareness and funding for melanoma research. Students have also been involved in skin cancer screening events.

The DIG at Oklahoma University College of Medicine (COM) holds four annual meetings. The initial meeting is introductory; the winter meeting is designed to discuss various dermatology-related topics; the spring meeting is centered on the process of applying to externships; the last meeting is a question and answer session after students have matched into dermatology. This DIG participates in melanoma awareness week by assisting with skin checks and a sun safety education program in local schools. A volunteer opportunity at a free dermatology clinic is also available.

At the Perelman SOM at the University of Pennsylvania, annual activities provided by the DIG include a career panel about dermatology, dinner with a faculty member of the dermatology department, interview preparation, and volunteering at a skin cancer screening event organized by the Department of Dermatology.

The DIG at State University of New York - Stony Brook University SOM meets three or four times per year to discuss applying to residency. They invite dermatology residents and practicing dermatologists to answer questions. Students who have matched into dermatology also are invited to share advice to DIG members.

At Texas A&M COM, the DIG has two to three meetings per year. The meetings involve residency application advice, interview preparation, and basic topics in dermatology. Additionally, the DIG organizes an annual free skin cancer screening event, as well as monthly free clinics. Members are also offered research opportunities and are encouraged to attend annual dermatology conferences.

The lack of a strong DIG may contribute to a diminished interest in dermatology amongst medical students. For example, the University of Colorado dermatology residency program historically accepts six new residents every year. However, an average of only one in every 157 University of Colorado medical students (0.64%) matched into dermatology each year over the last three years. A relatively weak DIG may contribute to this disparity between a large residency program and so few students entering the field.

At the University of Florida COM, the DIG serves as the interface between medical students and the Department of Dermatology, disseminating invitations to weekly grand rounds and other information. The DIG members have the opportunity to volunteer at Dermatology Night at a local outreach clinic one evening per month. This DIG has an annual meeting so that the newly-matched students can share advice with underclassmen. Other past events include meetings with dermatology residents and providing information at a table during National Epidermolysis Bullosa Awareness Week.

Lastly, the DIG at the University of Texas Medical Branch SOM meets once every one to two months with guest speakers including the dermatology residency director and residents. They participate in the AIM for the Cure Melanoma Walk and the National Psoriasis Foundation's Walk to Cure Psoriasis. Their Stay Shady project involves providing a presentation on sun protection and skin cancer awareness at local community health fairs and grade schools. Members also volunteer at the St. Vincent's student clinic during dermatology nights.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Not only do DIGs benefit the field of dermatology as a whole, but they also are of the utmost importance to medical students interested in dermatology. They introduce medical students to the field, provide guidance and support as students apply for residency, and allow for supplemental training in dermatology. Mentorship is one of the most beneficial aspects of DIGs, among other benefits listed in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Benefits provided by DIGs

Beneficial topics for DIGs
Mentorship from medical students, residents, and dermatology faculty
Information about how to apply for dermatology residency
Interviewing advice
Assistance in pursuing dermatology-related research
Community service opportunities
Education about common dermatologic conditions and procedures
The use of online blogs for DIGs
Dermatology as a career choice

For the schools included in this review, 73% of applicants matched into dermatology in 2015. In future studies, it would be useful to quantitatively compare match rates to DIG involvement, with a larger number of medical schools represented.

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