Fostering Interest without Intimidation in Otolaryngology

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I am currently a fellow in otolaryngology, and I have never reviewed Electronic Residency Application Service applications. However, I hope for an academic career, so I am likewise concerned with the recent trends in otolaryngology applications. I am writing to suggest a potential avenue for increasing future otolaryngology residency applications.

My path to otolaryngology started with something simple: an interest. As an early medical student, I was not thinking about board scores and publications. I simply enjoyed surgery and the anatomy of the head and neck. As a student, I did not have any publications or presentations on my curriculum vitae. I let my interest guide me. Fortunately, my interest superseded my lack of publications, and those who helped foster my interest became my mentors.

As a resident, I reciprocated this mentorship by creating an otolaryngology interest group (IG) for medical students at my institution. The IG scheduled events and demonstrations (eg, laryngoscopy, otomicroscopy) for students to learn about otolaryngology. The IG was designed to provide what Dr Chang refers to: it was organized by residents and students, offered to all students, and not elitist; it removed barriers by avoiding in-depth discussions of “necessary” qualifications for applicants. It offered an unintimidating environment for students to learn about the specialty without the pressures an authority. Students came to meetings because they were interested, not because they had a certain board score. We surveyed residency programs around the country to see how active the concept of an IG was and found that, unfortunately, IG played only an minor role in influencing residents’ interest in the specialty.

It is difficult to quantify interest on an application. However, fostering interest in lieu of intimidation through otolaryngology IGs might reverse the recent trends in otolaryngology residency applications.

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References

Mindful Mentoring

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I thank Dr Naples for his letter and insight. Everyone has a story about how she or he got interested in otolaryngology. The details vary from person to person, but they all usually have one common denominator: mentorship. During my surgery rotation as a third-year student, I chose to rotate through orthopedic surgery. My first day involved holding the leg stationary in a certain position for the duration of the case. Later that day, I happened to meet Joe Edmonds, MD, then a fifth-year otolaryngology resident, who basically said to me, “If you jump ship to come and check out ENT, I’ll be able to show you the ropes.” That was the start of it all.

Mentorship happens in many ways. Mentorship can come from faculty and resident physicians. Mentorship can come from medical students. Mentorship can come from family and friends.

Otolaryngology interest groups in medical schools are one way to mentor those interested in the specialty. These groups enable medical students to experience and grow as part of a community of like-minded students. However, for this group to truly be successful, it requires not only a cadre of motivated and interested students but perpetual investment and enthusiasm from department faculty.

Insinuating otolaryngology more formally into the medical school curriculum would be beneficial. However, connecting