

Medical student awareness and interest in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

Cassandra Coleman, OMS-III, Christian Shafer, OMS-III, Edie Sperling PT, DPT
Department of Anatomy, Western University of Health Sciences COMP-Northwest, Lebanon, OR

ABSTRACT

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R) is a growing specialty, but the number of residency positions has been growing three times slower than that of total graduate medical education (Barrette, Petriceks). Many medical students lack awareness of the field and are likely to pursue other options for residency (Brane). With an increased need of PM&R physicians with specific skills in rehabilitating and treating the country's aging population, there is value in understanding medical student perspectives regarding the field (Petriceks).

OBJECTIVE

The goal of this research is to determine why medical students are not familiar with PM&R versus other common specialties like pediatrics, surgery, family medicine, or others. They might not have interacted with physiatrists as much as other physicians because it is a smaller field. From that understanding, we can determine how these students want to learn about PM&R and develop those opportunities for them and future students. Perhaps the PM&R interest fair cited (Brane) is advisable in addition to other educational and interactive means: faculty mentors in PM&R, a PM&R department, more preset rotations offered in PM&R without requiring students to find their own PM&R preceptor.

STUDY DESIGN

A questionnaire was developed using primarily multiple-choice questions with one comment box at the end. The survey consisted of one consent question and 12 questions pertinent to the research being conducted. It was distributed to current first and second year medical students at COMP/COMP-NW via student e-mail and the private student-only Facebook page, and administered via Qualtrics. The results were analyzed by the research investigators to determine relationships between awareness of and exposure to the PM&R specialty and the decision to pursue it as a career.

The survey received 167 responses from the first and second year cohort of medical students.

RESULTS

Of the 167 responses, 15 respondents only responded to the consent question and didn't answer any of the asked questions. Therefore, all the data below was collected for the 152 surveys that were answered. 132 students were aware of the field of PM&R before taking the questionnaire and 19 students were not. 97 students have had no prior PM&R experiences while 19 have shadowing experience in PM&R and 15 have been exposed in the PM&R club. The most common ways the students have become aware of or learn about specific medical specialties is shadowing experiences (121), the internet (108), fellow medical student colleagues (82), medical education (84), and treatment by a physician (72). When it comes to the expectations from students for their school to set up a rotation in PM&R, 27 students said that they do expect their school to set up a rotation in PM&R, 48 do not, and 77 are not sure. 53 students plan on doing a PM&R rotation while 33 do not and 66 students are not sure if they will do a PM&R rotation.

When it comes to aspects that medical students view as the most important when deciding on a specialty in general, medical students ranked interest in the specialty the highest with 132 students ranking it in their top 5 of importance out (mean= 2.12) of 18 different aspects. The next highest ranked in the top 5 include work/life balance (115 students, mean rank = 2.93), personality fit (70 students, mean rank = 4.70), and patient population (68 students, mean rank = 6.22).

When asked if they had to choose a specialty today, the most popular fields of medical students include Emergency Medicine (17 students), Pediatrics (17 students), and Family Medicine (16 students). 14 medical students listed they would choose PM&R as a specialty if they had to choose a specialty today. 38 medical students answered that they were interested in the field of PM&R, 44 students answered that they were not and 56 students were not sure. For those medical students who stated they were interested in pursuing PM&R, 30 medical students indicated the most important factor for pursuing this field is due to the work/life balance and 26 stated interest was the most important decision. For those not interested in pursuing PM&R, the most important reasons why include interest (46 students), prior exposure (8 students), specialty content (7 students), and specialty content (7 students).

Of the medical students who were questioned, 102 students would be interested in learning more about PM&R while 16 students would not and 19 students are not sure. Of those who are interested in learning more, the most popular responses as to how they would like to learn more include: information session with PM&R faculty member (87 students), more elective rotation options during 3rd or 4th year (70), interest fair with PM&R attending physicians available to answer questions (51 students), participation in a PM&R club (41 students), required rotation during 3rd or 4th year (37 students), and attending a PM&R national conference (26).

A final free response section was available for students to share their thoughts or ideas that might be helpful to our research, with many sharing they had recently learned about it at a club week presentation or mentioned briefly and most of the responses expressing interest in learning more about PM&R.

DISCUSSION

Results of the survey indicate that there is an interest in the field of PM&R that exists in current medical students. While there is a majority of students who are aware of the field of PM&R, there is a deficit in the amount of experiences medical students are exposed to regarding the field, allowing for growth of exposure opportunities to help fuel interest in the field. This is evident by the majority of students who answered the questionnaire stating that they would like to learn more about the field.

In order to increase medical student exposure to the field of PM&R while they're in school, efforts should be made to increase the amount of shadowing opportunities, exposure in medical school curriculum, and encourage participation in the current PM&R clubs that are on both campuses. Through participation in the PM&R clubs on campus, efforts can be expanded to help fund guest speakers and participate in dual club events to help bridge the fields of PM&R, Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine, and Pediatrics.

It is evident that there is a gap in the exposure and understanding of PM&R as a specialty in medicine to medical students. The information gathered from this research will offer valuable insight for the PM&R clubs on campus to help expand on exposure and information regarding PM&R. PM&R is a field that spans across multiple disciplines and important in many patient care plans including Family Medicine, Emergency Medicine, and Pediatrics. There is a common misunderstanding among medical students regarding all the topics and items that the field of PM&R covers and this research can help guide PM&R club leaders into tailoring their club events to better cover the scope of the field. This way, all subspecialties of PM&R can be properly addressed and presented to all medical students, regardless of what specialty they are interested in pursuing.

CONCLUSION

74% of students were interested in learning more about PM&R with 64% of students interested in specifically learning more through an information session with a PM&R faculty member. This information can be presented to the university as an area of focus. One response expressed interest in a session during a conference week about what a physiatrist does, and we agree that information sessions can help illuminate the path for medical students deciding on which specialty to pursue, whether that be PM&R or any other specialty within medicine.

REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Barrette K, Perloff M. Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. *Am J Phys Med Rehabil.* 2017;96(2):131-132. https://journals.lww.com/ajpmr/Citation/2017/02000/Physical_Medicine_and_Rehabilitation_The_Changing.12.aspx

Brane, Lucas B. BS; Carson, Ross BS; Susmarski, Adam J. DO; Lewno, Adam J. DO; Dicianno, Brad E. MD Changing Perception, American Journal of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation: May 2017 - Volume 96 - Issue 5 - p 362-365 https://journals.lww.com/ajpmr/Abstract/2017/05000/Changing_Perception_Outcomes_from_a_Physical.13.aspx

National Resident Matching Program, Results and Data: 2020 Main Residency Match®. National Resident Matching Program, Washington, DC. 2020. https://mk0nrmp3oyqui6wqfm.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/MM_Results_and-Data_2020.pdf

Petriceks, Aldis H. BA; Hales, Hannah A. BS; Srivastava, Sakti MBBS, MS Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, American Journal of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation: October 2019 - Volume 98 - Issue 10 - p 931-936 https://journals.lww.com/ajpmr/Abstract/2019/10000/Physical_Medicine_and_Rehabilitation_Trends_in.13.aspx