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Letter to the Editor

The impact of medical student interest in surgery on clerkship performance and career choice



Dear Editor,

We read with interest the study by Kassam et al.¹ exploring medical student interest in surgery and its effect on clerkship performance. As medical students who have completed our surgical clerkships, we would like to suggest how interest in surgery can be sparked before the start of a surgical clerkship, and how this interest can be developed during the clerkship.

As mentioned in the study, early exposure to different aspects of surgery is important, such as surgery grand rounds and surgical research. We would also like to add the suggestion of surgically-themed workshops in the early, pre-clinical years of medical school. A systematic review of medical student interest in a surgical career highlighted the importance of pre-clerkship exposure.² These workshops improve confidence in surgical skills and could therefore increase interest in a surgical career. Medical schools and undergraduate surgical societies can aid in the development and organisation of these workshops. Although the study by Kassam et al. did not show a correlation between interest and clerkship performance, this interest should nevertheless be piqued through early exposure (before the start of the clerkship) in order to attract students to consider pursuing a career in surgery in the first place.

Another suggestion for students starting their surgical clerkships is to understand that not all surgeons are good educators. In our experience, some surgeons prefer to 'get on with the job' when they work and thus do not bother teaching in the clinic or operating room. When faced with such a surgeon, our suggestion is for students to avail themselves of other opportunities related to surgery during their clerkship. For example, students can spend more time on surgical wards understanding the indications for a particular operation, or learn more about the management of

post-operative complications. This does not require the presence of a surgeon who a student knows to be a poor educator, as there will be other doctors on the surgical wards available for targeted undergraduate medical teaching.

Today's medical students are tomorrow's surgeons. Providing early exposure to surgery, as well as improving the experience of a surgical clerkship, is vital in promoting surgery as a career to medical students. We hope that medical schools, undergraduate surgical societies, and students themselves continue to work to improve their experience of surgery and surgical clerkships.

References

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2. Peel JK, Schlachta CM, Alkhamesi NA. A systematic review of the factors affecting choice of surgery as a career. *Can J Surg*. 2018 Feb;61(1):58.

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