

## Reply to Letter to the Editor



*To the Editor:* Rodriguez et al<sup>1</sup> suggest that the growing emphasis on publications in matching dermatology applicants conflicts with achieving diversity within the dermatology workforce. The increased number of publications seen in matched dermatology applicants often are the result of research fellows, which are unpaid, thereby disadvantaging under-represented minorities and students from lower socioeconomic status.<sup>2</sup>

Assume for the moment that the authors are correct that we should continue, as was so wrongly done in the past, to think of people as being members of distinct, diverse, different groups, and that we should aim now for inclusive diversity of dermatology trainees from among these groups. Given that assumption, the respondents' suggestion that we help those considered to be in disadvantaged groups gain mentorship to increase their publication numbers might be beneficial; nonetheless, we do not know with any great degree of certainty how much this would help achieve the goal of training a diverse dermatologic workforce. Another potential approach to "level the playing field" would be to pay medical students or fellows during their research years to reduce financial barriers faced by those of lower financial means.

We believe the authors have assumed there is an increased reliance on the number publications in the matching process. We do not know how much consideration residency selection committees actually give to the number of publications. The increasing number of publications we observed is not particularly strong evidence that committees take the number of publications into account, much less that their emphasis on this metric is increasing. A survey of dermatology program directors ranked the top 5 criteria for dermatology residency selection to be interview, letters of recommendation, United States Medical Licensing Examination Step 1 score, medical school transcripts, and clinical rotations. Number of publications was ranked ninth of 25 applicant criteria. Research fellowship was ranked 20th.<sup>3</sup> However, this survey was conducted in 2014, and selection criteria may have changed.

It may simply be that students believe they need to publish more to have a better chance of acceptance, or perhaps students have greater opportunities to publish more articles with technology allowing aspiring dermatology residents to reach out and ask for research opportunities. Still, it seems reasonable to discourage both students and residency selection

committees from focusing on publication number. Diversity is important to our field. We should take a holistic view of candidates' applications and read through the entire application, as we have no evidence that the number of publications correlates in any way with a given candidate's potential.

*Abigail Cline, MD, PhD,<sup>a</sup> Adrian Pona, MD,<sup>a,b</sup> William W. Huang, MD, MPH,<sup>a</sup> and Steven R. Feldman, MD, PhD<sup>a,c,d</sup>*

*From the Center for Dermatology Research, Department of Dermatology, Wake Forest School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, North Carolina<sup>a</sup>; the Department of Internal Medicine, Vidant Medical Center/East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina<sup>b</sup>; and the Departments of Pathology<sup>c</sup> and Social Sciences & Health Policy, Wake Forest School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.<sup>d</sup>*

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*Correspondence to: Adrian Pona, MD, Department of Dermatology, Wake Forest School of Medicine, Medical Center Blvd, Winston-Salem, NC 27157-1071*

*E-mail: [pona1318@hotmail.com](mailto:pona1318@hotmail.com)*

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