

How to Foster Camaraderie in Dermatology Residency



Sonali Nanda, MD

RESIDENT PEARLS

- Camaraderie in residency is a special dynamic that can be enhanced and fostered in many different ways.
- The relationships among residents should be treated with importance, as some of the friends you make will last a career and/or a lifetime.
- Conflicts inevitably will arise and learning how to handle them effectively can improve the residency experience.

Camaraderie and teamwork in dermatology residency are essential to the well-being and success of the residents and the overall program. Good relationships lead to better experiences inside and outside of clinic as well as enhance collaboration and learning. Establishing trust and genuine interest in one another is at the heart of fostering camaraderie with peers. Activities that can lead to a close-knit group include planning social events and attending local and national conferences together. When conflicts arise, handling them in an upfront and open manner is the key to maintaining strong relationships. Camaraderie can be fostered in many different ways, and in the end, everyone benefits.

Cutis. 2022;110:E20-E21.

Change is inevitable in residency as well as in life. Every year on July 1, the atmosphere and social structure of residencies change with the new postgraduate year 2 class. Each class brings a unique perspective and energy. Residents come together from different backgrounds and life situations. Some residents are single, some are engaged or married, and some are starting or expanding their families. Some residents will have prior careers, others will have graduate degrees or

expertise in various fields. They will have different ethnic backgrounds, religious and/or spiritual beliefs, familial upbringings, personalities, and methods of communicating. These differences all are important to consider when developing a mindset of inclusion and camaraderie. As residents start their journey together, it is important to remember that residency is a team endeavor. The principles of teamwork apply directly to residents and are founded on creating a climate of trust and building strong relationships with one another.¹ Trust is the foundation of good relationships in the workplace; it allows people to communicate freely and foster the belief that everyone is working for each other's best interests. Being open and sharing knowledge about networking opportunities, scholarships, and research projects is one way to foster collaboration and trust in residency.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion in dermatology is a work in progress. In the 2020-2021 dermatology application cycle, only 4.8% of applicants identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 7.8% identified as Black or African American.² The American Academy of Dermatology took an active role in promoting diversity by creating a task force in 2018 to increase the exposure and recruitment into dermatology of medical students who are underrepresented in medicine.² As standards for diversity are met in dermatology, we will have the wonderful opportunity to welcome even more diversity into our lives.

Listening, showing curiosity about your co-residents' lives outside of work, and asking questions can help build respect, friendships, and camaraderie. Ask your co-residents what makes them happy and what their goals are in residency. Finding common goals and cultivating the mindset that you all work together to achieve your goals is key to the success of a residency class. Now that

From the University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City.

The author reports no conflict of interest.

Correspondence: Sonali Nanda, MD (Sonali-Nanda-1@ouhsc.edu).

doi:10.12788/cutis.0670

we discussed accepting and welcoming differences, how do you foster camaraderie in a social setting?

Establish a Social Committee

As a class, consider 1 or 2 residents who are always excited to try new activities such as attend restaurant openings, exercise classes, concerts, or movie nights. Consider nominating these co-residents along with one attending to be social chairs of your residency. The social chairs should meet and establish at least 1 social event per season, with 4 total for the academic year. There are only 2 rules with social events: (1) they must be held outside of clinic, and (2) everyone should try their best to attend.

Social chairs should try to prioritize a location-specific event that allows the residents who are not from the area to experience something local, which can be anything from apple picking at an orchard in the fall to beach volleyball in the summer. Planning these parties gives everyone an event to look forward to and a chance to spend time together and grow closer. The memories and inside jokes that arise from these outings are invaluable and increase joy inside and outside of clinic.

Utilize Social Media

Another project can be developing a social media account for your program with the approval of your faculty. @unmcdermatology, @uwderm, and @gwdermres can help foster social relationships by establishing a light-hearted space to celebrate the residency's achievements, new publications, volunteer events, or social gatherings.

Encourage Local and National Conference Attendance

All residents should be encouraged to submit abstracts to local and national conferences and attend with their co-residents. Conferences are peak opportunities to foster camaraderie within residency classes, as they involve a sense of togetherness in the specialty along with the excitement of traveling to a new city and meeting other like-minded individuals. Conferences allow collaboration within the specialty on a national level and foster relationships between residency programs.

In addition, national groups such as the Women's Dermatologic Society, the Skin of Color Society, and the American Academy of Dermatology Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion task force meet at the national conferences and discuss their next initiatives and projects. Joining a society of your interest can lead to many new networks and relationships you may not have had before. Even if you are not interested in specializing after general dermatology,

consider attending a surgery, dermatopathology, or pediatric or cosmetic dermatology conference to learn more about the field from the experts.

Repair Conflicts and Build a Climate of Collaboration

Conflicts and disagreements unfortunately are inevitable during residency. Whether they involve planning vacation times or coordinating call schedules, everyone will not agree on every decision. Learning how to handle and approach conflict with co-residents is of utmost importance to maintaining the hard work you have put in to create trust, camaraderie, and a good social atmosphere. If you are having an issue with a circumstance involving a co-resident, holding a grudge will only sour your experience and the experience of others. Talking to your co-resident directly about your concerns before escalating the issue to a chief resident or faculty member is a great start. Consider asking them about their thought process and show concern for their point of view. Listen to them openly before going into your preferences. It is important to remember that working as a team requires sacrifices, and sometimes you will not be satisfied with the outcome of a conflict.

It also is important to remember that feelings change, and an issue you feel you must address immediately can wait to be addressed at a better time when you have calmed down. You may even find that you decide not to address it at all. At the end of the day, if a conflict cannot be worked out between those involved, consider confiding in a chief resident or a faculty mentor for advice on the next steps to take to resolve the problem. Ultimately, having a good foundation of respect and strong bonds with your residents will help tremendously when conflicts arise.

Final Thoughts

Fostering camaraderie in residency will improve the overall experience and lives of the residents, as well as the experience of the faculty, staff, and patients by the trickle-down effect. Creating a cheerful and fun atmosphere filled with inside jokes and excitement regarding upcoming social events or conferences will certainly result in a time you will cherish for the rest of your life.

REFERENCES

1. Kouzes JM, Posner BZ. Foster collaboration. In: Kouzes JM, Posner BZ, eds. *The Leadership Challenge*. 6th ed. John Wiley & Sons, Inc; 2017:195-217.
2. Cooper J, Shao K, Feng H. Racial/ethnic health disparities in dermatology in the United States, part 1: overview of contributing factors and management strategies [published online February 7, 2022]. *J Am Acad Dermatol*. 2022;87:723-730. doi:10.1016/j.jaad.2021.12.061