

Letter to the Editor

The Integrity of Dermatology Applicants

Dear *Cutis*[®]:

The Dermatology Residency Board (<http://pub50.ezboard.com/bdermatology>) is an anonymous Web site where dermatology applicants can vote in polls, some of which inquire into academic statistics. Concerns have been voiced that some Web-site users may be manipulating polls to achieve a particular result. Multiple voting cannot be prevented, and the fear is that some may be voting several times to discourage applicants from even applying. Further, a breach in integrity may be easily accomplished when submitting curricula vitae, because busy reviewers may not take the time to double-check the validity of applicant claims.

Although falsification of achievements by fellowship applicants has been reported,¹ misrepresentation by dermatology applicants was noted to be less likely compared with applicants to other specialty programs.² Faculty members at Vanderbilt University evaluated the accuracy of the bibliographies of 138 applicants for the October 1994 dermatology residency match. The cited articles were categorized as: 1) published; 2) in print/in press; 3) submitted for publication; or 4) in preparation/in progress. Of the 52 applicants who claimed to have articles published in the MEDLINE database, 49 gave accurate information, and 97% of citations (117/121) were accounted for. Vanderbilt faculty members concluded that deliberate deception by dermatology applicants was minimal.²

It is interesting to note that 28 applicants claimed 45 manuscripts were submitted for publication, but only 8 applicants (29%) published a total of 12 articles (27%). Further, 28 applicants cited 45 manuscripts were in preparation/in progress, but only 2 applicants (7%) published a total of 2 of these articles (4%).² These 2 category names do not easily lead to misrepresentation, but they do not provide substantive information about the applicant.

Faculty members at New Jersey Medical School agree with Vanderbilt faculty members that most

dermatology applicants honestly record their publications.³ They add that using MEDLINE to verify citations overlooks book chapters and some medical journals, especially foreign ones. To confirm the validity of publications, the faculty members recommend that mentors give students copies of journal submission letters and document students' work in their own letters of recommendation.

A poll was initiated on the Dermatology Residency Board Web Site for 2000–2001 to determine the honesty of voters. When asked about their honesty on earlier polls comparing credentials, only 5 of 50 responders said that they had falsified some responses.

We conclude that the dermatology applicant pool is blessed with an innate sense of honesty. As in all fields of medicine, integrity is of the utmost importance, and integrity shown during the stressful application process is an indicator of continued integrity during residency and beyond.

Sincerely,
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REFERENCES

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