

# Letter to the Editor

## Dermatology Foundation Career Development Award Recipients and Retention in Full-time Academic Dermatology

Dear *Cutis*<sup>®</sup>:

A growing concern for the decline in the number of academic dermatologists has led to several studies exploring possible explanations and solutions to reverse this ongoing trend.<sup>1-4</sup> Based on prior research, one of the characteristics of a dermatology residency program found to be strongly, inversely, and seemingly paradoxically correlated with producing full-time faculty was receiving Dermatology Foundation (DF) grants from 2001-2004.<sup>4</sup> We sought to objectively review Career Development Award (CDA) recipients from 1990-2002 to determine their career paths at least 5 years after receiving CDAs.

For this study, names of CDA recipients from 1990-2002 were obtained from the DF. Exclusion criteria included recipients who did not complete their residency in dermatology and part-time or volunteer faculty members. Career Development Award subtypes analyzed included Clinical CDA, Clinical CDA in Health Care Policy, Clinical CDA in Dermatologic Surgery, and Research CDA. To determine if a recipient was a full-time faculty member as of December 2007, a search for each recipient's name (N=79) was performed using various online search engines, such as Google and Yahoo, particularly for updated dermatology department Web sites, to retrieve their current academic affiliation. The 2007-2008 American Academy of Dermatology membership directory also was used as a guide to locate or contact members who were difficult to find. Some recipients received the award for up to 3 years. The percentage of recipients involved in full-time academic dermatology including trends based on the number of years awarded CDAs (1, 2, or 3 years) as well as the percentage of recipients involved in full-time academic dermatology by award subtype were calculated. Analysis was performed using the  $\chi^2$  test and  $P < .05$  was considered statistically significant.

Of the CDA recipients, 68.4% (54/79) were involved in academic dermatology full-time as of December 2007 and 3.8% (3/79) achieved the academic level of chair/chief. Continued involvement

in full-time academic dermatology varied by the number of years awarded CDAs ( $\chi^2=1.389$ ;  $P=.499$ ). Of the recipients awarded CDAs for 1, 2, or 3 years, 60.7% (17/28), 76.2% (16/21), or 70.0% (21/30) were involved in full-time academic dermatology, respectively. By subtype, 100% (5/5) of the Clinical CDA in Health Care Policy recipients were involved in full-time academic dermatology followed by 66.7% (2/3) of the Clinical CDA in Dermatologic Surgery recipients, 66.7% (18/27) of the Research CDA recipients, and 65.9% (29/44) of the Clinical CDA recipients. Interestingly, 36.7% (29/79) of the recipients held combined MD and PhD degrees, and, of the 29 MD/PhD recipients, 21 (72.4%) remained in academic dermatology.

Of all graduating dermatology residents from 1970-2004, approximately 7.89% became full-time faculty members.<sup>4</sup> Our current study demonstrated that 68.4% of CDA recipients from 1990-2002 were full-time academicians. Similarly, a survey of CDA recipients from 1999-2003 conducted by the DF revealed that 78% (88/113) of recipients continued involvement in academic dermatology.<sup>5</sup> However, their internal study possibly included other award types that are not specifically CDA, such as Clinical Fellowship in Pediatric Dermatology or Research Fellowship. Interestingly, 0.0096% of all graduating dermatology residents became a chair or chief,<sup>4</sup> whereas 3.8% of CDA recipients were found to hold these positions in the current study. Given that fewer than 10 years have elapsed since some of the recipients have been awarded a CDA, the percentage of CDA recipients becoming a chair or chief may actually be greater than 3.8%. Although statistical significance was not reached, our results demonstrated a positive trend in the number of years (1, 2, or 3 years) CDAs were received and the likelihood of remaining in full-time academic dermatology (60.7%, 76.2%, or 70.0%, respectively). An analysis of CDAs by subtype revealed 100% of the Clinical CDA in Health Care Policy recipients remained in full-time academic dermatology. However, the low power of this subtype analysis may contribute to the

lack of statistical significance. This study clarifies our prior report and suggests that full-time faculty who had received CDAs are more likely to remain in academic dermatology.

Sincerely,  
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The authors report no conflict of interest.

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