

Picture Perfect: Instagram as a Source of Dermatology Training Information

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Dear Editor,

The importance of dermatology mentorship for medical students cannot be overemphasized, as dermatology has historically been one of the most competitive residencies. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has restricted in-person opportunities, which has made it difficult for students, especially those without access to a home dermatology program, to receive mentorship. Interestingly, a recent article by Zheng et al described digital dermatology mentorship on Twitter during the COVID-19 pandemic (1). Twitter and related social media platforms can have tremendous benefits for students who do not have access to home dermatology departments. We would like to bring attention to Instagram (IG), a photo-sharing social media platform used by approximately 500 million people daily, with more than 50% of users between the ages of 18-34(2,3).

Although IG has traditionally been used for entertainment, users may also use it for educational purposes, such as obtaining residency information and forming mentor-mentee relationships. For example, @derminterest—the official account of the dermatology interest group association (DIGA)—routinely posts information about research fellowships and sabbaticals at various institutions, which is useful as it provides medical students with opportunities that are generally promoted in academic circles and are otherwise difficult to locate. The DIGA also partnered with the Association of Professors of Dermatology (APD) to create a formal mentorship program that connects medical students without a home dermatology department with faculty at other institutions. This program was advertised on DIGA’s IG account, where the sign-up sheet was also available.

Many residency programs also have IG accounts that provide information about their programs. Some residency IG pages provide information about “meet-and-greet” sessions with

residents, either by providing session links or IG “live,” a feature in which a host streams video while providing viewers the opportunity to directly engage with them by commenting. These sessions provide avenues for students to network with such individuals after presentations.

There are also different opportunities available for students on IG in addition to the traditional mentorship. Information on grants, scholarships, and webinars focused on preparing students for residency are routinely posted on different pages, such as @nmderm. Students also have the ability to directly message any dermatologist influencers to obtain mentorship remotely. As discussed by Zheng et al, this is useful as it allows for mentorship opportunities that would have not been geographically possible otherwise(1). **Table 1** provides an overview of different opportunities on IG and lists examples for medical students.

Similar to Twitter, IG could be used to supplement, not replace, traditional mentorship(1). As COVID-19 has limited opportunities for medical students—especially those without home dermatology programs—the use of Instagram to promote and organize virtual educational lectures and mentorship programs is increasingly important in light of restrictions on clinical rotations. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram have the distinct opportunity to expand dermatology opportunities and information and ultimately cultivate a future generation of pioneers in the field.

References

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Table 1. “Types of Mentorship Opportunities on Instagram”

Research Opportunities	@derminterest	“Accepting applications for a 1-year research position available immediately at The University of Alabama at Birmingham with Dr. Hui Xu”
		Compiled a spreadsheet for medical school students and advanced to use to find dermatological research opportunities and fellowships across the United States
General Dermatology Advice	@nmaderm	Lecture on “How to make your personal statement stand out” from residents and chief residents from different programs
		Lecture on “Now that I’ve matched...What’s next?” by the NMA Dermatological Mentorship Committee
	Promotion of the NMA’s Annual Convention and Scientific Assembly with topics ranging from practice management such as “Starting your own debt-free practice” to educational tutorials including “Microneedling in Scarring Alopecia”	
	@odac_derm	Advice regarding “Employment contract negotiations in dermatology” and physician aspirations’ effect on patient care
Residency/Research Fellowship Program Pages	@derminterest	“UCSF Epidemiology of Inflammatory Skin Disease Fellowship”
		Information regarding program updates “Opening for Funded PGY-2 Rheumatologic Dermatology Fellowship”
	@umichderm	Michigan Dermatology Society Meeting Hosted by the University of Michigan Medical School for Students
	@hfsdermes	Department of Dermatology Clinical Research Fellowship Application Advertisements
Grants/Scholarships	@odac_derm	“CMMP Medical Student National Grants to aid students of underrepresented minorities with residency preparation expenses”
	@texasdermatology	“More than 1000 scholarships available to attend the virtual congress of the European Academy of Dermatology”
Diversity in Dermatology Education	@nmaderm	Academic Lectures pertaining to minority related health issues and modes of treatment such as “Why black women lose their hair” from licensed stylists and dermatologists
	@odac_derm	“Virtual Meetings with the JDD: Sun care for all: new insights and solutions for protecting patients of all skin tones”
	@skinfofcolorociety	Literature Reviews regarding minority-related issues including, “Choosing the Right Sunscreen in Communities of Color”
General Education	@derminterest	“Certified Melanoma Educator Course”