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Influence of Research on Osteopathic Medical Student Residency Match Success

To the Editor:

We read with interest the 2019 study by Matthews et al¹ that examined the influence of research experience and accomplishments on the residency match success of osteopathic and allopathic medical students. We congratulate the authors on an important study; their work extends and complements an existing body of literature reporting that research experience increased the likelihood of allopathic medical students matching into their desired residency program for many, but not all, specialties.^{2,3} Their research provides the first quantitative data on this topic for osteopathic medical students.

The 2018 National Residency Match Program (NRMP) Program Director survey⁴ revealed that, for certain specialties (eg, radiation oncology, plastic surgery, neurological surgery, interventional radiology), more than 75% of program directors view “demonstrated

involvement and interest in research” as a key factor in the selection of applicants for an interview. Our survey among 328 first-year osteopathic medical students at 4 colleges of osteopathic medicine indicated that 315 students (96%) view research participation during medical school as important, with the predominant perceived benefit being increased competitiveness for residency applications (274 [83.5%] of respondents).⁵ Other perceived benefits include interacting with faculty (222 [67.7%]), developing skills for conducting research as a physician (219 [66.8%]), and deepened understanding of curricular concepts (212 [64.6%]).⁵

However, for both years of NRMP data analyzed by Matthews et al¹ (ie, 2016 and 2018), the availability of residency placement through the American Osteopathic Association rather than the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education led to a select pool of osteopathic medical students using the NRMP system. Therefore, since the American Osteopathic Association does not report information on research experience or accomplishments among matched vs unmatched candidates, the

actual influence of research on residency match success for osteopathic medical students overall is still unknown—despite strong perception among osteopathic medical students that research experience leads to enhanced competitiveness, as revealed by our work.⁵ We look forward to similar analyses being performed on NRMP match results for 2020, which is the first year of the single graduate medical education accreditation system and the earliest opportunity to directly compare the influence of research on residency match for osteopathic and allopathic medical students. Until then, we respectfully suggest that it is best to view the available NRMP data as historical, rather than prospective, as it pertains to the influence of research on osteopathic medical student residency match success. (doi:10.7556/jaoa.2020.057)

Jonathan W. Lowery, PhD

Julia M. Hum, PhD

Ivie Obeime, OMS III

Sarah Zahl, PhD

Christopher P. Parr, BA

Bryan Larsen, PhD

Marian University College of Osteopathic Medicine,
Indianapolis, Indiana

Tamara King, PhD

University of New England College of Osteopathic
Medicine, Biddeford, Maine

Glen Kisby, PhD

Western University of Health Sciences College of
Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific-Northwest,
Lebanon, Oregon

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