Residency Program Social Media Accounts and Recruitment - A Qualitative Quality Improvement Project

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Abstract

Social media use by United States medical residency programs has been gaining traction in medical education over the last few years. However, the degree of influence of residency program social media presence on a U.S. residency applicant's decision to apply to or rank a residency program through the National Resident Matching Program is unknown. Here we present our 2019 post-match quality improvement survey data from newly matched residents to Internal Medicine and Transitional Year residency programs at one community-based hospital. Our findings demonstrate that modern applicants value program social media profiles as additional information when determining whether to apply to or rank a residency program. As more U.S. graduate medical education programs move towards a virtual interview format, social media may play an increasingly important role in resident recruitment.

Keywords: social media; recruitment; recruiting; residency recruitment; applicants

Background and Methods

Our community-based midwestern Internal Medicine Residency social media presence began in August 2016 as a component of our diverse wellbeing program designed to improve connectedness within and between residents and faculty in our Internal Medicine, Preliminary Medicine, and Transitional Year residencies. Program-specific accounts were developed within the Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook platforms, and content was curated by a selected team of faculty and residents. Over time we noticed an increasing number of "followers" from medical students, many of whom later applied to or even matched at our programs. In March 2019 a post-match survey (Supplementary File 1) was distributed electronically to matched incoming residents into Internal Medicine, Preliminary Medicine, and Transitional Year residencies at our institution. This quality improvement work was
designed to understand the role that program media presence plays in the decision to apply to or rank our residency programs to further optimize our reach to potential applicants.

Results

Thirty-six of the 38 (94.7%) incoming residents completed the anonymous and voluntary survey via email link. Almost 42% (41.6%) of applicants stated that a program’s social media presence influenced their decision to apply to a particular program (Figure 1). Over half (52.8%) of respondents stated that a program’s social media presence had at least ‘a little’ impact or greater on their decision to rank a program at which they interviewed (Figure 2). For those who were impacted by our residency program-specific social media accounts, the impacts had a positive effect on their decision to rank our program - with Instagram having a more positive impact than Twitter or Facebook (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Influence of a program social media presence on applicant decision to apply to a particular program

Figure 2: Influence of a program social media presence on interviewee decision to rank a program
Figure 3: Impact of our program accounts on decision to rank *our* programs (% responses)

A great deal: 2.8% (1)
A lot: 8.3% (3)
A moderate amount: 19.4% (7)
A little: 22.2% (8)
None at all: 47.2% (17)
Newly matched applicants were asked to enter any additional comments on the overall role of social media presence in residency program recruiting with responses listed below:

"For me, social media played a pretty significant role in ranking programs (though primarily for my advanced program). It gives me insight into the culture and personality of the program, which is not really possible to do on the website and very difficult to do on a single interview day. It helps me get a better idea of what the people there value and if it aligns with me. Additionally, it's an extra resource to learn about the research, teaching, etc that a program does. The extra exposure in social media just makes me feel more familiar with the program and clear about what they offer."

"I liked looking at Instagram because it let me know that the program cares about well rounded residents and it allowed me to get a sense about how the residents interacted with each other."

"More than anything, it confirmed that it was the right fit for me."

"The social media presence reinforced the programs personality that I was shown during interviews and auditions but i wouldn't say it made a large impact in my decision making."

"I agree it has the potential to positively impact applicants decisions and create more transparency during the application trail."

"Not a factor for me in choosing a program, but seems like something I may enjoy following as a resident."

"Social media made St. Vincent more approachable, & more relatable. It made me excited to be colleagues with the personalities I was seeing."

"It's always great to see that residents and staff in the program truly are like a family. Everyone on interview day claims they get along well and hang out outside of work but to be able to see and confirm that online is helpful. It isn't the biggest deciding factor but certainly helps."

"For me your posts in social media were a way to confirm what you can see during an interview or while looking at your web site. In your post you can see people having good time during work time and also..."
"I was unaware of the social media pages before I applied. After applying and Interviewing at St. V, I followed the Facebook account very closely. It had a substantial impact on my view of the program and the residents wellbeing. No other programs had this and the social media pages were a great way to keep up with the program throughout the interview season. The social media pages solidified my decision to rank St Vincent has highly as I did. It also verified what I was told during the interview process about the program being a family environment. Other programs would say this but there was no proof of it. With St. V and the social media pages there was overwhelming proof that this is the case."

Discussion

While this single institution, 2-program experience may not be generalizable to all programs, our data suggests that social media presence may be an important factor for some applicants in determining to which programs to apply and rank in the match. The authors suspect social media presence will serve an even larger role in decisions to apply to or rank prospective residency programs in the virtual interview era. Our experience suggests that Instagram may be residency-seekers’ preferred social media format. More information is needed to understand the relationship between program social media profiles and applicants across specialties and program size.

Take Home Messages

- US residency program applicants may be influences by programs’ social media presence
- Residency recruitment committees should curate program social media profiles to aid recruitment

Notes On Contributors

Laurel Fick MD, FACP is the Program Director for the Transitional Year Residency and Associate Program Director for the Internal Medicine Residency at Ascension St. Vincent. She chairs the Internal Medicine/Transitional Year Physician Wellbeing, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee and the Graduate Medical Education Resident Wellbeing Subcommittee. ORCID ID: [https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1115-2627](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1115-2627)

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Bibliography/References

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Appendices

None.

Declarations

The author has declared that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Ethics Statement

This is quality improvement, therefore no IRB approval required though we did put the following notice at the beginning of the survey: "We are investigating the impact of social media (generally, and specific to our program) on interest in residency programs. Thank you for completing this optional and anonymous survey. Your responses may be used (in aggregate) for program quality improvement and/or research."

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