

Do Dedicated Research Years Matter? Perspectives from Plastic Surgery Program Leadership: A Pilot Survey

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Background Plastic and reconstructive surgery (PRS) is consistently one of the most competitive specialties in the Match. With USMLE Step 1 transitioning to pass/fail, and residency programs focusing on a holistic review of applicants, there has been an increased emphasis on research productivity for integrated PRS applicants, often manifested as dedicated research years prior to applying to residency. The purpose of this study is to assess PRS program leadership perspectives on dedicated research years in PRS residency applicants.

Methods An anonymous 9-question Google forms survey was developed to investigate PRS faculty's perception of research years in PRS applicants. The survey was piloted with PRS faculty at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, with plans to submit for ACEPS sponsorship and dissemination to all PRS program directors and assistant program directors.

Results 8 of 14 respondents completed the survey (57% response rate). Most respondents' overall perception of dedicated research years prior to PRS residency application was "Favorable," (6/8, 75%) while the rest were "Neutral" (2/8, 25%). All respondents perceived manuscript publication as the highest level of research productivity (8/8, 100%) followed by attainment of grant funding (6/8, 75%). All respondents agreed that the primary reasons to complete a research fellowship were to strengthen an applicant's curriculum vitae (8/8, 100%) and to increase exposure to the specialty (5/8, 62.5%). All respondents recommended a research fellowship in clinical outcomes (8/8, 100%) as opposed to basic science (0/8, 0%). Respondents would recommend research fellowships to applicants with weak spots in their application (7/8, 87.5%), as well as applicants without a home PRS program (5/8, 62.5%) and international medical graduates (5/8, 62.5%). For unmatched PRS applicants, most respondents recommended a research fellowship (6/8, 75%) as opposed to a preliminary year in surgery (2/8, 25%). The "Comments" section of the survey elicited two additional survey questions (questions 9 and 10).

Conclusion PRS faculty across all demographics generally have a favorable perception of integrated PRS applicants completing a research fellowship. PRS leadership would recommend a clinical research fellowship for students who do not have a home integrated PRS program, who have weak spots in their applications, and who are international medical graduates. Research productivity, especially in the form of manuscript publication and attainment of grant funding, is becoming increasingly important for PRS applicants.