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An analysis of the information on the websites for haematology and medical oncology fellowships

Eishin Takai*
Department of Hematology, University of South Florida, Tampa, USA

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to the development of advanced clinical skills and subsequent career development, fellowship training in a specific subspecialty of interest has always been regarded as one of the most important stages of postgraduate medical education. Additionally, those who apply for fellowships in a variety of medical subspecialties are given higher employment priority. With over 700 applicants annually, hematology and medical oncology is one of the most competitive subspecialties, with 172 ACGME-accredited fellowship programs. However, a study conducted by the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) found that the number of new graduates entering the workforce will soon be outpaced by the rising demand for hematology and medical oncology services. The aging of the oncology workforce and their subsequent retirement in increasing numbers are largely to blame for this rising demand. Furthermore, this situation is made even more dire by the rise in cancer survival rates [1].

DESCRIPTION

Numerous studies have previously emphasized the significance of websites for residency and fellowship applications in various fields. Residencies and fellowships are adapting to the virtual model of online web-based interviews for the selection and hiring of potential applicants since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Additionally, the majority of fellowship programs prefer to process applications through ERAS (Electronic Residency Application Service), highlighting the growing use of the internet to find fellowship opportunities. As a primary source of information regarding application requirements, deadlines, clinical training, didactics, benefits, and research opportunities, trainees place a high value on the website of a residency or fellowship program. The content, quality, and quantity of information on program websites all have a significant impact on applicants' decision-making [2].

Research in a variety of fields has shown that finding information about fellowship programs on the internet can be challenging. According to published research, a lot of medical discipline websites don't provide enough online information about the program's most important aspects. Ruddell et al. conducted a previous study, We decided to see if the increase in fellowship program positions in hematology and medical oncology in 2019 resulted in an improvement in the content and accessibility of fellowship program websites because the number of positions in these fields has increased from 549 to 638 in 2019. In addition,

Address for correspondence:

Eishin Takai
Department of Hematology, University of South Florida, Tampa, USA
E-mail: eishintakai@gmail.com

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in order to reflect hematology and medical oncology programs in North America, we included programs from Canada in our investigation [3].

The study's design and methodology did not require approval from an institutional review board (IRB) because all of the information used in this study came from publicly accessible online sources. The Fellowship and Residency Electronic Interactive Database Access (FRIEDA) was populated with keywords like "hematology and medical oncology" and "fellowship," and US-based programs were extracted for evaluation. A straightforward Google® search using the terms "Hematology," "Medical Oncology," "Fellowship programs," and "Canada" led to the discovery of Canadian programs. The programs that did not have a link to the website that worked were taken out. The FRIEDA-provided link or a straightforward Google search with keywords like "Program name," "hematology and medical oncology," "fellowship," and so on could be used to access the program websites. Since potential applicants were unlikely to look beyond the first page of search results, only the first page was viewed. All sponsored links were excluded from the search and cookies were disabled. We selected the top 25 programs that matched our obtained program list as "ranked" in our data collection after U.S. News and World Report evaluated 899 hospitals and created a cancer ranking list based on their eligibility criteria [4].

The authors looked over the program websites, starting with general information like where they were located and how much information was available about the program as a whole. The United States Census Bureau designated the regions into which the country was divided. A 40-point criterion was used to subdivide the domains further. Previous searches of a similar nature, such as those conducted by Niesen et al., were used to select these criteria. A Microsoft Excel® sheet contained all of the collected data. Websites were also looked at to see if they had been updated by meeting at least two of the four update criteria. The following were the variables: Fellows listed for 2019–2020, copyright listed for 2020, application deadline for 2020, and stipend information for 2020. A positive score was given to each variable that could be found on the website or through a direct link from the website, and a score of zero was given if the variable was not present. The total score for each program was then calculated using 39 standard data points and 1 update domain point out of a possible 40.

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), an IBM data analysis platform, was used to analyze all of the information gathered. Additionally, the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West regions were used to divide and analyze the programs, and the mean score for each US region was calculated. The mean percentage of fulfillment for each variable across all programs was determined by looking at the data. The mean percentage for each domain was assumed to be the domain's score, and the percentage of fulfillment for all variables for each domain was calculated. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to statistically compare the mean score of programs with and without rankings. The Kruskal-Wallis test is used to compare the mean score across US regions [5].

CONCLUSION

The purpose of our research is to examine the content and characteristics of fellowship websites for hematology and medical oncology. First and foremost, we draw attention to the troubling fact that 19 of the 169 program websites that we attempted to access did not have an accessible website. This is alarming in the age of the internet, where almost all information about potential fellowship programs should be available online. “Program Overview,” which was mentioned by 89% of programs, was the most frequently mentioned domain on websites, while alumni information was mentioned by only 23% of programs. USMLE steps scores, an important piece of information for applicants, were reported by less than half (46%) of the programs. However, this is a significant increase from the 0% that Ruddell et al. reported. In his study from 2019, indicating that programs have begun to recognize the significance of this crucial piece of information. 65 percent of the programs covered application information as a whole, which is a commendable increase from the 55.9% reported. One of the most important considerations for applicants in terms of their training and didactics, information on the program curriculum was provided by less than half (49%) of the programs.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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