Neurosurgical Forum LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Digitalizing neurosurgical pedagogy

TO THE EDITOR: In this increasingly digital age, it is paramount to adapt to shifting currents to promote a rich legacy not only for our patients but also for future generations of trainees. To that aim, we took great interest in the article by Teton et al.¹ on the *Neurosurgical Atlas* as a tool to advance neurosurgical education (Teton ZE, Freedman RS, Tomlinson SB, et al. *The Neurosurgical Atlas: advancing neurosurgical education in the digital age. Neurosurg Focus.* 2020;48[3]:E17).

The Neurosurgical Atlas, launched in 2016, is a high-quality free online educational resource for medical students, neurosurgery residents, and neurosurgeons.¹ On the *Atlas* website, a portion of the website is dedicated to medical students. As of March 2020, the resource for medical students begins with a chapter titled “Interested in Neurosurgery as a Career” that provides detailed articles describing the opportunities and challenges of a career in neurosurgery, advice on seeking neurosurgical mentors, and other topics that would be of value to a medical student considering a career in neurosurgery. Subsequent chapters offer advice on how to build a competitive application for neurosurgery residency while in medical school, including chapters on succeeding in the preclinical years, finding research opportunities, writing a personal statement, applying to residency programs, preparing for interviews, and more.

Similar to the *Atlas*, the Neurosurgery Podcast hosted by Michael Wang, MD, and John Paul Kolcun, MD, provides a free resource for the public to learn more about neurosurgery, with some episodes providing specific advice for students interested in neurosurgery (<https://www.aans.org/en/AANS-E-News/2020/1-31-E-News/Neurosurgery-Podcast>). Both *The Neurosurgical Atlas* and the Neurosurgery Podcast for medical students are entirely free and in particular increase access to a neurosurgical career for individuals who may come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and lack the social capital (i.e., connections) to readily find mentors in neurosurgery.

A study by Linzey and colleagues showed that a specialized social media team for the *Journal of Neurosurgery* increased engagement and propagation of neurosurgery research and education using Twitter and Facebook.² Indeed, efforts by neurosurgeons and neurosurgery residents to educate the student population about the field of neurosurgery through widely used social media platforms

like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram³ may provide an excellent opportunity to pique and continually stimulate interest in neurosurgery, especially if students can relate based on commonalities in gender, race, and socioeconomic background, among others.

In the digital era, mentorship and education can take place online and reach a wider audience than ever possible before.^{1,4} This may provide a means to attract and educate talented and ambitious young high school, college, or medical students about neurosurgery.^{1,5-7} Given the prevalence of use and reach of the internet and social media, it can be argued that these platforms represent a great opportunity to increase medical student interest and recruitment to neurosurgery. It is widely recognized in the field of neurosurgery that mentorship is a crucial part of training a future neurosurgeon, and social media may be an effective tool to provide mentorship to a wider audience.¹

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Disclosures

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Response

We greatly appreciate Wilson and colleagues' kind words regarding our recent work published in *Neurosurgical Focus*. We agree whole-heartedly that we are living in an unprecedented age of information accessibility and technology. With any great change comes an abundance of opportunity for innovation. All of the works mentioned by Wilson et al. are excellent examples of individuals and programs rising to meet this moment, and we agree with the suggestions that they provide to others who wish to do the same. We look forward to seeing how the field of neurosurgery evolves to take advantage of this extraordinary time and will make every effort at *The Neurosurgical Atlas* to do the same.

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