
EDITORIAL

The importance of research by urology residents: a thousand points of light

"Time is Money". With that said, we might as well conclude that research for urology residents is a vanishing commodity. In an age of shrinking healthcare resources, increasing demand for clinical productivity, and strictly regulated resident work-hour it is protected research time that receives the short end of the straw. As residency programs are down-sized from 6 to 5 years, it is most often the research year that gets eliminated. Protected time for research during residency ranges from 1 year to none, with many programs demanding that some clinical research productivity be built into the regular work week. These programs engage in a mad rush a few weeks before abstract deadline for AUA/CUA or other meetings, to find suitable studies for the residents to write up and submit - a futile exercise that is worth about as much as the little time and effort invested in it.

A full year of research is becoming increasingly difficult to fund, and only a few residency programs can afford this luxury. Those programs pride themselves in producing clinician-scientists, and many of the future leaders of our specialty receive their starts enriched by such an experience. Other programs manage to pull together support for 6 months of research, which, although insufficient time to provide training in basic research, is nevertheless an opportunity to expose residents to the scientific process. Many institutions are skeptical that this is well-spent time and money—it is up to us in academic leadership positions to convince them otherwise.

Not all residents will show an aptitude to produce Nobel prize worthy research, but this is not expected of them. Some residents may never produce results that even pass the scrutiny of a critical reviewer, although let it not be for the lack of trying. The experience of going through the scientific process, from conceptualizing a challenging question, studying the literature, designing a study to answer the question, carrying out the research plan as designed, analyzing the data, and preparing the results for an oral and written presentation - provides a thousand points of cumulative skills that will be priceless in the development of that resident physician even if he never again lifts another test tube. Skills such as statistics, and topics such as bioethics and disease epidemiology, along with many of the most boring classroom experiences may come alive in the context of a project that the resident is actually excited about. "Scholarly activities" should not only be a slogan that is a mandatory part of residency program requirements, but should also be an active and dynamic process that enriches all individuals engaged in it. Therefore, we should strive to maintain this as an integral part of the resident experience.

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