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EDITORIAL

Cardiothoracic Anesthesiology Fellowship Programs Website Assessment and Recommendations for Fellowship Web-based Platforms

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Anesthesiology residency applicants have been reliant on using program websites to procure information, prepare for interviews, and create a rank list.¹ In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted more interviews to occur remotely. To best prepare for these interviews, applicants are more reliant on program websites to gather information to familiarize themselves. Because of the crucial roles websites play in aiding applicants, it is imperative to assess them for their ability to accomplish their intended roles. There have been prior studies assessing websites of fellowship programs; however, there has not been such a study for adult cardiothoracic anesthesiology fellowships. This letter intends to analyze and describe current trends in cardiothoracic anesthesiology fellowship websites and suggest areas of improvement.

For applicants, this letter will provide a general overview of what kind of information tends to be present on program websites and will function as a guide for both expanding the breadth and depth of information present and for creating a more structured and organized interface. For program leadership, this letter aims to provide insight regarding which information should be available to better present a program to prospective applicants.

All of the current accredited cardiothoracic

anesthesia fellowships available were found using the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) website.² Individual program websites were then found via the World Wide Web search engine. Of the 75 listed programs on the ACGME webpage, websites were found for only 74 programs. A prior survey provided to anesthesiology residency applicants served to identify which information was requested and considered to be useful on program websites.¹ This survey has been used as a basis for studies assessing other fellowship program websites as well.³ The 22 criteria used to assess each website are presented in Table 1. This list of criteria was gathered from assessing prior fellowship studies such as the field of regional anesthesiology and acute pain medicine fellowships.³

The presence of a criterion was defined as it being mentioned in a page of the fellowship program's website. Two of our authors functioned as evaluators to assess how many of the criteria each program met; the evaluators assessed websites independently. For instances in which there was nonagreement between the 2 evaluators, a third author would evaluate the website and serve to settle the discrepancy.

The results for each criterion are presented in Table 1 and the percentages of websites meeting each criterion varied from 11% to 99%. The mean number of criteria present

among all available websites was 13.01 out of 22 (59.1%), and the range was 6 to 20. Most (81%) of the websites met at least 50% of the examined criteria. Criteria that were present in fewer than 25% of websites included alumni information (24%), institution case volume (19%), summaries (16%), and call responsibilities (11%). More than 90% of the websites fulfilled criteria such as accreditation status, functional website, 1-click accessibility from the World Wide Web, and program descriptions. None of the websites fulfilled all 22 of our selected criteria.

There were various criteria that most websites have not met. Only 24% of programs included information regarding alumni. For applicants, identifying alumni and being able to contact them would likely serve as an invaluable source of information, as alumni have firsthand experience regarding the program's values, culture, strengths, and weaknesses. For program leadership, a display of the alumni would allow for a cohesive representation of the program graduates. It is possible that some alumni would opt in favor of protecting their privacy; a compromise could involve websites presenting names and limiting the contact information displayed.

Institution case volumes were present on only 19% of websites. Case volumes would allow applicants to assess the diversity of

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cases performed at an institution. During the training period, one would want to be exposed to a vast array of cases to build competence and confidence. Some websites provided categories such as the number of cardiac and thoracic cases performed. Other websites presented more detail, quantifying specific procedures that were conducted.

Only 33% of adult cardiac anesthesiology fellowship websites contained a video summary. Some topics that the videos discussed include information about the area, a general hospital overview, an introduction to the specific fellowship program, supervision, didactics, research, case variety, types of procedures, facilities, the culture of the program, and desired traits of an applicant. Using a video can function as a means to welcome visitors to the website and as an easily accessible location for some of the most popular information.

Some program directors may decide that certain fellowship details are unnecessary to provide on program websites because these webpages should not be the sole source of information for applicants. The interview serves as a crucial exchange of information for both parties. Program directors can directly interact with the applicant and determine whether they would be a suitable candidate for their institution. For applicants, the interview is an arena in which they can receive more information about the specific program by having their questions answered directly by a representative. The result of this interaction is that both parties become sufficiently informed, so the extent to which an applicant is an appropriate fit for the specific program may be determined.

The presence of more information on program websites does not decrease the value of the interview, nor does it make program websites more valuable than the interview, rather, websites function as a supplement to aid applicants. As a whole, current adult cardiothoracic anesthesiology

fellowship program websites do not provide sufficient pertinent information; the most absent information pertained to alumni, program summaries, call information, and annual institution case volumes. Programs should strive to provide relevant information in a well-organized manner on their website, as this would benefit an applicant's ability to decide which programs to further investigate, where to apply, and paired with the interview would allow them to determine which program is a proper fit for them.

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Table

Table 1. Criteria Used to Assess Cardiothoracic Anesthesiology Fellowship Websites

Criteria	Programs That Provide the Information (N = 75), % (n/N)
Accreditation status	99 (74/75)
Functional website	99 (74/75)
Program description	97 (73/75)
Applicant process description	89 (67/75)
Research	87 (65/75)
Types of procedures or “advanced training”	83 (62/75)
Coordinator contact	77 (58/75)
Journal club/conferences	72 (54/75)
Director contact	71 (53/75)
Program address	69 (52/75)
Schedule	65 (49/75)
Didactics	61 (46/75)
Number of available positions	56 (42/75)
Faculty involved	55 (41/75)
Current fellows	47 (35/75)
Video summary	33 (25/75)
Salary	28 (21/75)
Life in the area	27 (20/75)
Alumni	24 (18/75)
Annual institution case volume	19 (14/75)
Summary	16 (12/75)
Call responsibility	11 (8/75)