

## **Medical Students' Perception of Plastic Surgery**

S. Shaharan<sup>1,2</sup>, C.W. Joyce<sup>1</sup>, K. Lawlor<sup>1</sup>, K. Joyce<sup>1</sup>, J.L. Kelly<sup>1</sup>

1. Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Galway University Hospital, Ireland
2. Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead, UK

Dear Sir,

Most doctors and medical students view surgery as a rewarding career choice due to technical challenges, teamwork and the ability to deliver timely and meaningful care in an acute and elective setting.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, there has been a significant reduction in number of applicants for surgery worldwide.<sup>2</sup> This current trend causes a great concern on the surgical specialties including plastic surgery and the views of medical students has greater significance with the advent of run through training programme. We assessed final year students' perception of plastic surgery as a career choice and the influence of an intensive rotation in plastic surgery on their future decisions.

All final year medical students from National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) completed a questionnaire before and after their plastic surgery rotation in Galway University Hospital. During the clinical rotation, they were required to attend a series of lectures on fundamental topics in plastic surgery, outpatient clinic, plastic surgery minor operating lists and elective, as well as emergency theatres session.

A total of 73 of 107 medical students (response rate, 68%) completed the questionnaire. The number of students considering surgery increased to 33% overall after the rotation and to 28% in plastic surgery.

In the questionnaire, we asked the medical students to answer "Yes" to both positive and negative perception on the nature of plastic surgery and the personality traits of the plastic surgeons. The most outstanding personality trait of plastic surgeons perceived by medical students was that they were good teachers as the percentage of students' response increased by 41% after the rotation. They also appreciated that it is a rewarding specialty, although it is competitive and requires long hour work shift.

This study highlighted the positive benefits of a short three-week exposure to plastic surgery in the final medical year. We concluded that this was as a result of our carefully tailored timetable for the medical students.

The biggest change was a major increase in medical students' perception of the academic knowledge within the department. Our plastic surgeons generally would take time to explain and discuss with the students on any particular clinical cases when appropriate. This generates the knowledge of the actual work in clinical plastic surgery on daily basis and not just a specialty that focused on aesthetic and glamorous lifestyle. If they choose to be trained in a different specialty, given the multidisciplinary nature of plastic surgery and the abundant team working with other medical and surgical specialties, it is important that non-plastic surgery colleagues are aware of the work carried out by plastic surgeons.<sup>3</sup> This potentially would improve patient referrals<sup>4</sup> and ensure the best treatment options for the patients.

In conclusion, a dedicated clinical attachment to plastic surgery team with a well-constructed timetable in the undergraduate programme improves the perception of plastic surgery among the medical students and may influence their decision in pursuing their future career.

**Corresponding Author:**

Ms. Shazrinizam Shaharan,  
Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery,  
Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead, UK.  
Email: shaharas@gmail.com

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