The Value of Resident Presentations at Scientific Meetings

As journal editors, we strongly support resident research and believe that poster submissions are an effective and important medium for residents to present their findings at national and international scientific meetings. Contrary to common misconceptions, posters are not necessarily a 'lesser' presentation; many excellent, published studies have been presented originally as posters. Program committees might choose the oral program for reasons other than scientific merit (driven by continuous medical education requirements or attendee ratings, 'controversial' clinical topics to drive meeting attendance, etc.). As a result, high-quality clinical and basic research may not be accepted to the podium portion of the program.

Additionally, posters have some advantages over podium presentations for the presentation of clinical and basic science. Oral presentations are time-limited and only heard once, whereas posters stay up for 1 or more days – sometimes the entire meeting – and viewers can spend as much time as they like reviewing the findings. Posters also allow more dialogue and interaction. Most meetings have meet-the-author receptions for presenters to discuss their work, and at many meetings blocks of time are dedicated to poster viewing and discussion. Moreover, some societies are moving towards also providing electronic poster access to attendees, further enhancing the distribution of work presented in this format. Moving forward, posters are likely to be increasingly a valuable part of more meetings, as they have been at some basic science meetings for years.

In addition, a poster presentation is often the first or only opportunity for a resident to attend a national meeting, which is generally a very positive experience for several reasons: residents will learn a great deal, improve their appreciation of research and its application, and begin to build contacts with peers and colleagues. It also engages them in a process of scientific inference, moving from observations in their own patients to generalizations that may improve the lives of others. Furthermore, like all facets of clinical training, the skills to perform and publish proper clinical and basic science research

need to be developed. Encouraging residents to present at meetings, whether in a poster or oral format, teaches them to develop a working hypothesis, sound methodology and appraise the literature in a critical manner. Often, it takes a project or two to learn these techniques, resulting in a personalized style of research that will improve their success for publication and the quality of their future submissions.

As journal editors, we have an obligation to peer-review and publish the best research and scientific material, regardless of whether it originates as a poster, podium presentation or an independent submission. Posters, because of their visual format, are often the preferred venue for case reports, which can be difficult to get accepted for publication in peer-reviewed journals. Nevertheless, we all agree that giving residents an opportunity to attend meetings and describe their work is important. In addition, we believe that resident research and poster submissions can play a beneficial role in helping become better journal authors.

Although we certainly recognize the increasing financial pressures on academic medical centers and departments, we would urge that training programs provide some level of financial support of this important enterprise, with the details obviously left to the discretion of individual departments. The immediate payoff may not always be apparent, but we believe the eventual benefit to the training program and the specialty are certainly worthy of support.

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