

Research During Residency and Fellowship: Why Bother?

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Residency and fellowship can be challenging, combining an intensive work schedule with reading, preparation for boards and trying to maintain your personal life.

Doing research requires a lot of dedication, time and abilities. There is no guarantee that your project will succeed and that your article will be accepted for publication, and usually there are no financial rewards for the resident as well. So why would somebody spend the extra time and effort in research?

There are two especially good reasons I believe you should consider a research project. First, it's intellectually stimulating. I usually see it as a *gym time* for my brain. Like any exercise, you may not see the results immediately but you will see a difference over time. Second, it's a team sport. You can meet good people and make friends through research. You learn to appreciate different opinions and personalities.

I am sure almost all of us were asked in our medical school admission interview why we decided to become medical doctors. Many of us probably replied that we want to help people, save lives and improve health care. I believe that successful clinical research can be an excellent way to achieve this ideal. While you feel a lot of satisfaction with your clinical

work, the magnitude of that satisfaction is increased substantially with research.

In my field, physical medicine/rehabilitation and pain management, we deal with chronic problems that, while almost impossible to cure, need to be alleviated and controlled. I believe that many of the patients we treated during the fellowship year improved; some reported a significant difference in their lives and a few wrote appreciation letters.

I would estimate that, at best, I might have impacted the lives of a few hundred patients over the fellowship year through my clinical work. Over the same period of time, I received numerous inquiries from many different places around the world about the research article I published. That could well have impacted the care of tens of thousands of patients.

The National Institute of Cancer (Havana), Belgium Poison Center (Brussels) and the Central Library of Medicine Foundation (Buenos Aires) all contacted me recently regarding my research. But the most rewarding letter for me was sent in March by a grandmother of an eight-year-old girl with a diagnosis of mesenchymal chondrosarcoma. She stated that my article was used in the treatment of children and adults battling sarcoma

and by the national online support group for mesenchymal chondrosarcoma, as well as several adult and pediatric sarcoma groups. That particular article required a very significant investment of time. At some point, I felt guilty for taking so much from my own family; but, after receiving her message, I felt that I would do it again.

We all believe that our mission as physicians is to alleviate suffering, save lives and improve health care. Occasionally this high ideal is blurred with the concerns of "making the bottom line," "getting the job done," and the pressure to pass the boards or be promoted. I believe that clinical research is an excellent altruistic opportunity to achieve a higher ideal and make your personal microscopic contribution to making the world around you a better place to live. ■

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