Publication Misrepresentation Among Otolaryngology Residency Applicants

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OBJECTIVES: To assess the extent of research publication misrepresentation among otolaryngology residency applicants and to determine appropriate strategies for addressing misrepresentation.

INTRODUCTION

Applying to Residency is Competitive

Rate of Misrepresentation

In 2010, there were over 5000 (20%) more National Resident Matching Program participants than there were residency spots available. There were 37 otolaryngology residency programs that accepted applicants associated with otolaryngology residency applicants than residency positions available.1

Publication Misrepresentation in Other Specialties

Researchers in numerous other specialties have documented that up to 50% of applicants misrepresent their research publications.2-17 No prior studies have assessed the effectiveness of methods such as the American Medical College Application System (AMCAS) and Residency Electronic Application Service (ERAS) in preventing publication misrepresentation among residency applicants.2-17 This study is the first to assess publication misrepresentation among otolaryngology residency applicants, and to our knowledge, the first study to prospectively examine research effectiveness of contact applicants directly. Of all applications evaluated, 94% were accurately reported on the ERAS applications.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Subjects and Methods: ERAS applications to the University of Pittsburgh Otolaryngology Residency Program for the incoming 2010 class of an otolaryngology residency program were reviewed for peer-reviewed journal publications reported, incorrectly accepted, or accepted, but were later determined to be retracted by searching PubMed, Google Scholar, and electronic medical libraries. Two fellowship directors sent electronically generated email messages to the applicants identified as having potentially misrepresented publications. The estimated total search time was 51 hours.

RESULTS: Forty-three applications and 46 publications were reviewed before 266 publications were reviewed after the email messages were sent. Among the 266 reviewed publications, 22 publications (5.1%) were misrepresented.18

Publication Misrepresentation Compared to Other Specialties

Types of Misrepresentation

Types of errors included inappropriately reporting an article as provisionally accepted, incorrectly listing oneself as first author on the ERAS application, and improperly listing that the article appeared in a peer-reviewed periodical. The definition used for provisionally accepted was a commitment by the journal to publish the article. Of the 17 publications incorrectly reported as provisionally accepted, the authors of 5 articles said they misunderstood the definition of provisional acceptance. Authors of 5 articles said they misunderstood the definition of provisional acceptance.

CONCLUSION:

An Opportunity to Decrease Inadvertent Misrepresentation

Researchers should work with ERAS to redefine provisional acceptance so that candidates can be adequately informed of these publication statuses. The future of ERAS should include standardized definitions for publication statuses to help reduce inadvertent misrepresentation.

REFERENCES