

## RESEARCH LETTER

### Why Dermatology? A Survey of Factors Influencing Resident Physician Selection of a Career in Dermatology

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Choosing a medical specialty is an important decision, and each specialty has unique characteristics. Dermatology, a field specialized in the treatment of skin, hair, and nails, has widespread appeal. This widespread appeal is supported by the competitive residency selection process and consistently high career satisfaction rates. In Medscape’s 2017 physician compensation report, dermatologists reported a high career satisfaction rate. Additionally, 80% of dermatologists would choose the same specialty again.<sup>1</sup> Currently, there are no studies in literature that address the reasons why residents choose dermatology as a career. This study will help determine what influenced dermatology residents and fellows to pursue a dermatology career.

A 13-question web-based survey ([www.surveymonkey.com/r/whyderm](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/whyderm)) was emailed to the residency program directors and coordinators of 121 Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)-approved dermatology residency programs. The residency program directors and/or coordinators then forwarded the survey to eligible residents and fellows. The email was sent in July 2017 and resent in October 2017.

A total of 242 responses were received. The mean age of responses was 29.54 years old. Of the responses, 41% were postgraduate-year two. Residency geographic regions were diverse. Eighty percent of responders had been to the dermatology clinic as a patient. Of these responders, 66% were seen for acne (Table I).

**Table I:** Respondent characteristics.

	% of Respondents (n = 242)
<b>Age of respondents</b>	29.54 years
<b>Age of first exposure to dermatology</b>	16.91 years
<b>Dermatology Year</b>	
PGY2	40.9%
PGY3	26.4%
PGY4	28.9%
Fellow	3.7%
<b>Area of Country</b>	
Northwest	2.1%
Northeast	19.3%
Midwest	27.7%
East	2.9%
West	10.5%
South	19.7%
Southeast	12.6%
Southwest	5.0%
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Single	39.0%
Married	57.1%
Engaged	2.5%
Partnered	0.01%

**Table 1 Continued:** Resident and fellow survey responses.

	% of Respondents (n = 242)
<b>Do you have children?</b>	
Yes	18.4%
No	81.5%
<b>Do you have siblings?</b>	
Yes	93.6%
No	6.3%
<b>Are you the:</b>	
Only child	5.9%
Oldest child	40.4%
Middle child	20.8%
Youngest child	32.7%
<b>Have you been to dermatology as a patient?</b>	
Yes	80.1%
No	19.8%
<b>Reason for first dermatology visit</b>	
Acne	66.9%
Dysplastic Nevus	23.4%
Warts	13.0%
Atopic Dermatitis	8.6%
Acne and Dysplastic Nevi	4.3%
Alopecia/Hair	4.3%
Seborrheic dermatitis	4.3%
Skin Exam	3.4%
Basal cell carcinoma	2.6%
Cyst	2.6%

Respondents were told to rank in descending order their top five factors in choosing a career in dermatology. In descending order, lifestyle, personal interest in dermatology, positive dermatology clerkship experience, dermatology mentor, and future job opportunities garnered the most responses (Table II). Ninety-nine percent of respondents would choose dermatology as a specialty again (Table I).

The dermatology match is competitive, but the reasons why residents choose it as a specialty has not been evaluated in literature. Interestingly, financial rewards and career prestige were not in the top five choices selected.

**Table 2:** Respondents' top 5 reasons for choosing Dermatology.

	No. of Respondents (n = 242)
Lifestyle	191
Personal interest in dermatology	184
Positive dermatology clerkship experience	159
Influence from a mentor	131
Future job opportunities in the field	118
Financial rewards	116
Career prestige	74
Past personal history of a skin condition	67
Family history of a skin condition	38
Family exposure to the career	31
Current personal history of a skin condition	27
Geographical location	25

Our survey was similar to other surveys that demonstrate that dermatology has a high career satisfaction rate<sup>1</sup>, as 99% of respondents would choose dermatology as a career again.

In conclusion, our study demonstrates that surveyed residents and fellows are highly satisfied with their choice of dermatology as a medical career. Lifestyle, personal interest in the field of dermatology, a positive dermatology clerkship experience, an exceptional mentor, and future dermatological job opportunities were the top five reasons why residents and fellows chose dermatology as a career in our survey. Our data can help medical students who are contemplating dermatology as their future medical career.

**Conflict of Interest Disclosures:** None.

**Funding:** None.

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