Letter to the Editor

Pharmacy Residency Applicants: Charisma as the “X” Factor

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To the Editor:

The pharmacy residency application process is a labor-intensive, grueling, and uncertain period for programs and applicants alike. Residency programs work feverishly each year to rank an impressive group of candidates for interview, and applicants struggle with how to present themselves in the most desirable light. Unfortunately, the supply of residency positions cannot keep up with the demand of interested applicants. In the span of 6 years (2008-2013), the number of applicants has increased 114% (2,092 vs 4,480 applicants), while available residency positions increased only 55% (2,032 vs 3,156 positions).^{1,2} Furthermore, 36% of the applicant pool in 2013 went unmatched.² The question of what separates a great residency candidate over an average one remains unclear.

The residency application and ranking process for the most part is objective. Applicants are granted interviews based on various metrics that underscore their professional career. In a recent study, the elements of an application that were most likely to affect the invitation to interview at a large teaching institution were identified.³ The 7 characteristics most likely to be associated with an invitation to interview include professional association involvement, presentations, rotation experiences, publications, pharmacy work experience, grade point average, and skills and certifications.³ Although every institution's ranking evaluation is slightly different, the overall process is the same. Each metric is given a numerical value, and the applicant ultimately receives a sum score. This score is ranked against fellow applicants, and a program decides how many individuals to invite for an interview. For the majority of programs, and up to this point in the process, the applicant is a projection of what is on their application. The interview is usually the first time that the objective ranking meets the

subjective assessment. Those who have been involved in interviews know that it is not uncommon for there to be a mismatch between what is expected from an application and what is presented during an interview.

An unpredictable and powerful characteristic presents itself during the interview – one that cannot be ranked on an online or paper application. Applicants either struggle with this trait or let it shine as soon as they enter the room. Easy to identify, yet hard to measure, an applicant's *charisma* is one of their most memorable characteristics. In an application process where most candidates blend together and in a profession where communication skills and personality are pivotal in creating professional relationships, charisma is a trait that separates applicants from one another. In my experience, it is those charismatic applicants who leave a lasting impression after the interview.

Formally defined as “as special charm or appeal that causes people to feel attracted and excited by someone,” charisma has been identified as a key underlying characteristic of effective leaders and mentors.^{4,5} Charismatic individuals inspire motivation and foster the professional growth of their peers.⁵ As the demand for pharmacy residency positions continues to grow and the applicant pool continues to impress, a metric is needed to help distinguish the great from the exceptional. Even though charisma cannot be evaluated on an initial application, it should be considered as a crucial variable in the interview to help determine which applicants are the best fit for a residency program.

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