

Filling the Pipeline: Generating Interest in Rheumatology as a Career Choice

Developing and increasing the rheumatology workforce is an important endeavor for academic rheumatology divisions. The American College of Rheumatology 2015 Workforce Study found that demand for rheumatology services was increasing over time, but supply was decreasing. This module presents strategies for divisions to foster interest in rheumatology as a career choice among students, residents, and internists (such as hospitalists.)

- **Generating Interest**
- **Medical Student Specific Strategies**
- **Resident and Postgraduate Specific Strategies**

Generating Interest—General Recommendations

- **Build up your presence and reputation** in the medical school and internal medicine training program; knowing who your “great teachers” are and ensuring they are involved in this process is essential.
 - Discuss and negotiate with course directors and internal medicine program director to increase contact with students and residents as part of their curriculum. Rationale includes lack of contact/exposure to rheumatology, improvement of performance in rheumatology on tests/in service exams/IM boards, improvement of competency in physical exam, and when to consult/refer to rheumatology
 - Offer to sponsor journal clubs and interest groups, include food if possible
 - Be a role model whenever and wherever you are working with students and residents. Enthusiasm and explanation of why you are passionate about rheumatology is compelling and influential, especially for those who have not decided on a career choice. For example, you might mention the intellectual challenge of multisystem disease and being able to figure out a puzzling case, cutting-edge therapeutics, the lifestyle (no “in house” call), the enduring patient relationships, and the research opportunities.
- **Invite rheumatology faculty** to give Medicine Grand Rounds at least two times a year to increase general visibility of the field
- **Be available** to give Medicine Grand Rounds at neighboring and other institutions
 - Note funding opportunities for visiting professors, such as the Pfizer visiting professor program and the RRF pediatric visiting professor program

Medical Student Specific Strategies

- **Make sure your required teaching is well prepared**, consider bringing a patient for students to meet and talk with during a lecture, workshop, or other presentation
- **Develop and offer a well-organized elective rotation** for medical students in rheumatology clinic, including options for MD/PhD students (who may have required continuity clinics)
- **Volunteer to be a student mentor**
- **Develop and offer a rheumatology interest group**; this could be concomitant with the musculoskeletal teaching (usually during their second year)
- **Use the Choose Rheumatology program** (www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Student-Resident/Explore-Rheumatology/Choose-Rheumatology) and interviews with articulate patients to explain why rheumatology is important.

DIVISION DIRECTORS' TOOLKIT

- **Leverage research, preceptorship, and other award opportunities** such as those offered by the Rheumatology Research Foundation:
 - Annual Meeting Scholarship
 - Medical Student Preceptorship
 - Student Achievement Award
 - Rheumatology Future Physician Scientist Award (for MD/PhD students)
- **Advertise the above opportunities;** for example, most schools have a newsletter
- **Create or attend a transition course** for MD/PhD candidates transitioning from their PhD experience to their third year clerkships
- **Introduce fourth year students at your institution** after they match in internal medicine to the rheumatology faculty in their new institution as potential mentors
- **Participate in MD/PhD and internal medicine residency selection committees** and follow up on accepted candidates who express an interest in immunology or rheumatology

Resident/Postgraduate Specific Strategies

- **Develop and offer** a well-organized elective or mandatory rotation
- **Offer a rotation and mentoring** for affiliated residency programs that do not have access to rheumatology teaching or fellowship training
- **Involve hospitalists in rheumatology clinic and teaching rounds;** hospitalists are potential candidates for subspecialty training.
- **Offer to attend and teach** at internal medicine morning report, noon conference, journal club, and grand rounds.
- **Recruit rheumatology grand round speakers** to be an expert or master clinician at the resident morning report, noon conference, resident clinical case consult
- **Be innovative:** create inpatient subspecialty rounds with hospitalists, multidisciplinary rounds/conference opportunities (with food, if possible)
- **Use Rheum2Learn modules** to complement in-person teaching:
www.rheumatology.org/Learning-Center/Educational-Activities/Online-Courses/Rheum2Learn
- **Leverage research, preceptorship, and other award opportunities** such as those offered by the Rheumatology Research Foundation:
 - Annual Meeting Scholarship
 - Resident Research Preceptorship
 - Medical and Pediatric Resident Research Award
- **Participate in a Physician Scientist Training Program component** of an internal medicine training program

Generating interest in rheumatology as a career choice is crucial to preserving a “pipeline” of candidates for fellowship training. One survey indicated that mentors and clinical experiences were the most influential ways of generating interest among students and residents. Demonstrating and sharing enthusiasm and passion for what you do, whether in the patient care, research, or administrative arenas, is an essential element of filling the pipeline.

RESOURCES: Kolasinski SL et al. **Subspecialty choice: Why did you become a rheumatologist?** *Arthritis Rheum* 2007 Dec 15;57(8):1546-51 PMID 18050228
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18050228