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CASE AND RESEARCH LETTERS

[Translated article] How do Medical Students Actually See Dermatology? A Cross-Sectional Study Using the Mentimeter App



¿Cuál es la visión de los estudiantes de medicina sobre la Dermatología? Un estudio transversal usando la herramienta Mentimeter

To the Editor,

Currently, society's perception of dermatology is biased. Part of the population considers it a trivial and straightforward specialty where the dermatologist's primary motivation is purely financial. However, Dermatology is a broad and complex medical-surgical specialty that encompasses the skin, appendages, and mucous membranes, and covers multiple areas of knowledge such as cutaneous oncology, dermatopathology, immunodermatology, venereology, surgery, etc.^{1,2} Furthermore, dermatological diseases are one of the most common reasons for primary care consultation, being one of the specialties with the greatest need for specialist evaluation and the highest number of referrals.³ Moreover, dermatological conditions have a significant impact on the patients and their cohabitants' quality of life and represent significant spending for the health care system.⁴ The mistaken perception of Dermatology in society could be partly due to a lack of awareness on our specialty.⁵

Therefore, the objective of this study is to evaluate the opinion of fourth-year medical students about Dermatology and assess the impact of the Dermatology course on their perception.

For this purpose, we designed a cross-sectional study and included fourth-year medical students who took the Dermatology course during the 2021-2022 academic year at Universidad de Granada Medical School, Spain. Students who attended the Dermatology seminars were included and categorized into 2 groups: those who attended at the beginning of the course (from March 15th through April 15th) and

those who did so at the end (May 1st through May 30th). They were asked about the positive and negative aspects of the specialty through the Mentimeter tool.⁶

A total of 45 students were included in the study, 26 of whom gave their answers at the beginning of the course and 19 at the end. At the beginning of the course, the positive aspects students highlighted on the specialty were money, the absence of on-call duties, and quality of life (Fig. 1A), while the negative aspects they mentioned were the monotony involved with this specialty (Fig. 1B). After completing the course, students highlighted as positives of Dermatology that it is an interesting, comprehensive specialty, without on-call duties, and with the possibility of private practice (Fig. 2A). Negative aspects were that it is a highly demanded specialty with difficult access and complex diagnoses (Fig. 2B).

This study shows that the initial perception of Dermatology has to do with good quality of life and financial position, whereas after completing the course, students have a more realistic view of the specialty and consider it comprehensive, complex, and full of employment opportunities.

An Italian study found that most of the population knew, at least, 1 skin disease—psoriasis, dermatitis, urticaria, skin tumors, nevi—and that dermatologists were the second health care worker they sought advice from when having skin problems after the family doctor. However, in pediatric skin conditions, only 38% identified the dermatologist as the go-to specialist.⁷ On the other hand, in a different study conducted in the United States, more than half of the respondents believed that dermatologists had a less critical profession and that their work was easier than that of primary care physicians or cardiologists. Additionally, more than 90% of participants believed that dermatologists worked fewer hours, and up to a third thought that dermatologists spent most of their time performing cosmetic procedures. Regarding the financial aspect, the public perceived that dermatologists earned more than primary care physicians, but less than cardiologists or plastic surgeons. The authors consider that this opinion about Dermatology is partly due to a lack of knowledge about our activity and highlighted the need to train the population on the factual reality of the Dermatology specialty.⁸

In this regard, former studies conducted among Dermatology students also show that the perception of the specialty and the role of the dermatologist improves after

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Figure 1 Perception of medical students at the beginning of the course on A) positive aspects of the specialty and B) negative aspects of the specialty.

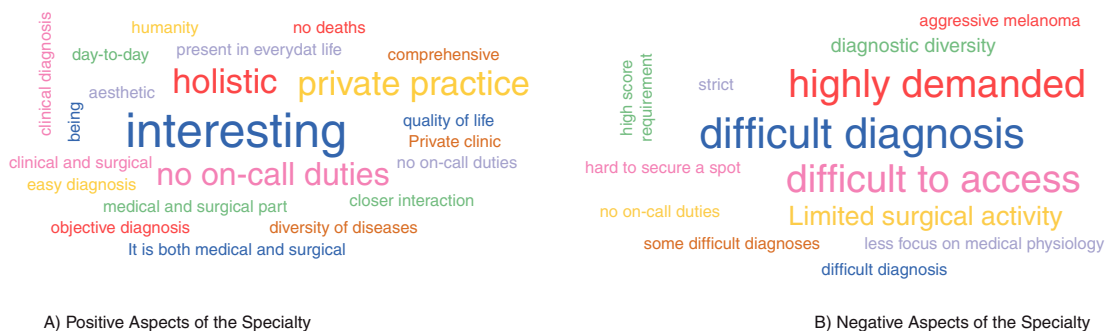


Figure 2 Perception of medical students at the end of the course on A) positive aspects of the specialty and B) negative aspects of the specialty.

completing the course.⁹ Additionally, Fundación Piel Sana of the Spanish Academy of Dermatology and Venereology is currently conducting promotional campaigns to raise awareness about Dermatology and the role of the dermatologist among the general public.¹⁰

This study has some limitations, such as its limited sample size and the absence of follow-up. Among its strengths, the fact that few studies have analyzed the perception of medical students about the specialty using new technologies and assessing the impact of the course.

In conclusion, this study shows that the perception of Dermatology changes after taking the course and highlights the importance of educational efforts regarding the perception of dermatologists and the specialty, both in academic settings and in society.

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Conflicts of interest

None declared.

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