

Letter to the Editor

General surgery: More complex, less attractive for medical students

Dear Editor-in-Chief,

We read with great interest your article entitled "Factors affecting interns to prefer general surgery specialization" by Yıldırım AC et al. (1), which appeared on pages 2022;2(4):79-83 in The Atlantic Journal of Medical Science and Research. The authors highlighted a major problem concerning the specialization in General Surgery. This discipline, once attractive, and inspiring the most talented medical students, has been losing its appeal for several years. Indeed, it seems that this problem does not only affect the Turkish medical community. In Tunisia, on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, some students prefer to retake the specialization exam if they are constrained to choose General Surgery as a specialty.

Admittedly, the causes of this declining attractiveness of General Surgery in Tunisia are similar to that in Turkey: Excessive workload, high-risk procedures, mobbing in the department, and low financial income. Other causes have diverted the choice of Tunisian students to other medical specialties, such as the tendency to opt for a specialty where acquiring autonomy is easier, the problems related to an ambiguous status of the surgery resident, and the lack of standardization of training between departments.

The advent of laparoscopic surgery and then robotic-assisted surgery appears to fascinate students in the early years of medical school (2). However, the effect of this surgical revolution is negatively influencing the attractiveness of General Surgery: Many students think that surgery is becoming more and more difficult to

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learn, with the multiplication of techniques and approaches.

Other social factors should also be mentioned:

Patients' perception of surgery residents is in most cases negative (3), sometimes to the point of refusing to let them participate in their care. Being aware of the complexity of the surgical specialty, some patients perceive that a surgery trainee may be more life-threatening than the disease itself. This conflicting situation constitutes an additional challenge for the General Surgery resident.

In several countries, the medical student population is becoming predominantly feminine. Some studies have shown that choosing a surgery career is influenced by the student's gender, with a tendency for women to avoid choosing surgery as a specialty (4).

The declining attractiveness of General Surgery is a topic often overlooked by the medical community. The involvement of surgery professors seems to be crucial in this matter, as some studies emphasize that the presence of a mentor can positively influence the attractiveness of surgical specialties for students (5). Other solutions can also be envisaged on the academic level,

by encouraging sub-specialization and valuing General Surgery residency training programs.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the study.

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Authors' Reply

Dear Authors,

I appreciate your interest in our study "Factors affecting interns to prefer general surgery specialization". I read your letter to the editor, which significantly contributes to our concern about the low preference rates of general surgery after medical school graduation. The problems resulting in these low preference rates seem precisely the same in your country too. It might be accepted as a universal problem to some degree. Shortly, we may conduct a study which will be conducted multicentered in our countries together.

Best Regards