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Public understanding of the training requirements for dermatology providers: more education may be needed

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To the Editor:

Advanced practice providers (APPs) are essential members of medical care delivery teams; physician assistants/associates (PAs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) are increasingly employed by dermatology practices [1]. Recently, the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) proposed a title change from physician assistant to physician associate. The American Academy of Dermatology Association (AADA) opposes this change owing to the potential to exacerbate patient confusion and the inability of the proposed term to reflect the differences in education and training compared to board-certified dermatologists [2]. As such, we sought to identify layman's knowledge of the training required to become a dermatology provider.

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained. Subjects were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online crowdsourcing platform used extensively in social science research [3]. Our survey was made available to United States MTurk users ≥ 18 years old. As a part of a larger survey inquiring about their willingness to be treated by different providers, participants were presented with multiple-choice questions about training requirements for dermatology providers. Subjects failing to complete the survey or failing ≥ 1 attention check (stated willing to be treated by a cat or dog in

question before/after training questions) were excluded from the analysis.

Of 372 individuals that began our survey, 298 completed it; 132 were then excluded for failed attention checks. Responses from 166 participants were analyzed. Similar to the average American, most participants were female, white, and completed higher education (**Table 1**), [4]. Most subjects correctly identified the training required to become an MD primary care physician (PCP), (78.3%), DO PCP (58.4%), and board-certified MD/DO dermatologist (60.2%), (**Table 2**). A majority also correctly identified the meaning of FAAD (Fellow of the American Academy of Dermatology), (83.1%). In contrast, respectively, 10.8% and 18.7% of participants correctly identified physician assistant and physician associate training; most participants believed physician assistants (71.1%) and physician associates (62.1%) completed a residency. A minority (19.1%) believed there was no difference between physician assistants and physician associates; 46.0% believed physician associates received more schooling or more dermatology training than physician assistants. A minority (25.9%) of participants correctly identified nurse practitioner training. In addition, 29.5% of participants correctly identified the training required by estheticians.

Although the demographics of our sample may not be entirely representative of the general population, we used stringent attention checks to help assure the integrity of the data. In addition, whereas the

Table 1. Demographic data of respondents.

Demographics	Number of Responses (N=166)	Percentage of Responses
Gender		
Male	69	41.6%
Female	95	57.2%
Other	2	1.2%
Age		
18-30	49	29.5%
31-40	47	28.3%
41-50	32	19.3%
51-60	24	14.5%
61-70	12	7.2%
71-80	2	1.2%
Race/Ethnicity		
White	119	71.7%
Asian	14	8.4%
Black or African American	23	13.9%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.6%
Hispanic or Latino	7	4.2%
Other	2	1.2%
U.S. Census Bureau Regions		
New England	7	4.2%
Middle Atlantic	23	13.9%
East North Central	19	11.4%
West North Central	8	4.8%
South Atlantic	38	22.9%
East South Central	9	5.4%
West South Central	22	13.3%
Mountain	14	8.4%
Pacific	26	15.7%
Highest level of education		
High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)	14	8.4%
Master's degree	29	17.5%
Some college but no degree	30	18.1%
Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)	69	41.6%
Doctoral degree	3	1.8%
Associate degree in college (2-year)	18	10.8%
Professional degree (JD, MD)	1	0.6%
Less than high school degree	2	1.2%

correct answer choices for our questions were based on typical training requirements, some states and training programs may have different requirements for certification to become a provider [5,6].

Respondents failed to correctly identify training requirements for DO physicians (41.6%), board-certified dermatologists (39.7%), physician assistants (89.2%)/associates (81.4%), nurse practitioners (74.1%), and estheticians (70.5%). Additionally, most respondents believed physician assistants differ from physician associates. As such, there may be a need for better public education of the training requirements for all types of dermatology providers. All providers serve as valuable components to the healthcare team, but patients may benefit from understanding training requirements in each role before administration of medical care. Providers and organizations, such as the AADA and AAPA, could consider sharing content to better educate the public on providers' training.

Potential conflicts of interest

Dr. Steven Feldman has received research, speaking and/or consulting support from Galderma, GSK/Stiefel, Almirall, Leo Pharma, Boehringer Ingelheim, Mylan, Helsinn, PHD Biosciences, Celgene, Pfizer, Valeant, Abbvie, Samsung, Janssen, Lilly, Menlo, Merck, Novartis, Regeneron, Sanofi, Novan, Qurient, National Biological Corporation, Caremark, Advance Medical, Sun Pharma, Suncare Research, Informa, UpToDate and National Psoriasis Foundation. He is founder and majority owner of www.DrScore.com and founder and part owner of Causa Research, a company dedicated to enhancing patients' adherence to treatment. The remaining authors have no conflicts to disclose.

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Table 2. Survey questions and correct responses regarding the training of dermatology providers.

Questions and answers	Number of responses (N=166)	Percentage of responses
How much training is required for a MD primary care physician?		
4 years medical school + 3 years residency*	130	78.3%
4 years medical school	21	12.7%
2 years medical school + 2 years residency	14	8.43%
2 years medical school	1	0.60%
How much training is required for a DO primary care physician?		
4 years medical school + 3 years residency*	97	58.4%
2 years medical school + 2 years residency	32	19.3%
4 years medical school	31	18.7%
2 years medical school	6	3.61%
What does FAAD stand for?		
Fellow of the American Academy of Doctors	14	8.43%
Fellow of the American Academy of Dermatology*	138	83.1%
Fellow of All American Doctors	8	4.82%
Fellow of the American Academy of Dentists	1	0.60%
How much training is required for a board-certified MD or DO dermatologist?		
4 years medical school + 3 years residency + dermatology board exam	56	33.7%
4 years medical school + 1 year of general residency + 3 years dermatology residency + dermatology board exam*	100	60.2%
4 years medical school	7	4.22%
2 years medical school + 6 years dermatology residency	3	1.81%
How much training is required for a dermatology physician assistant?		
4 years physician assistant school + 3 years residency	47	28.3%
2 years physician assistant school + 2 years dermatology residency	71	42.8%
4 years physician assistant school	30	18.1%
2 years physician assistant school*	18	10.8%
What is the difference between a dermatology physician assistant and a dermatology physician associate?***		
Physician assistant school is longer	14	11.1%
Physician assistants receive more dermatology training	30	23.8%
Physician associate school is longer	17	13.5%
Physician associates receive more dermatology training	41	32.5%
There is no difference*	24	19.1%
How much training is required for a dermatology physician associate?		
4 years physician associate school + 3 years residency	38	22.9%
2 years physician associate school + 2 years dermatology residency	65	39.2%
2 years physician associate school*	31	18.7%
4 years physician associate school	32	19.3%
How much training is required for a dermatology nurse practitioner?		
2 years nursing school + 2-3 years Master of Science in nursing*	43	25.9%
2 years nursing school + 3 years residency	29	17.5%
2 years nursing school + 2-3 years Master of Science in dermatology	47	28.3%
4 years nursing school	47	28.3%
How much training is required for an esthetician?		
2 years esthetician school + 1 year residency	38	22.9%
600 hours (4-6 months full-time) esthetician school*	49	29.5%
2000 hours (1 year full-time) esthetician school	66	39.8%
4 years esthetician school	13	7.83%

*Denotes correct answer choice.

***N=126; question was added to survey after initial data collection had begun.