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# Improving young physician membership and engagement in a dermatology physician organization: The Women's Dermatologic Society as a case example

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## Improving young physician membership and engagement in a dermatology physician organization: The Women's Dermatologic Society as a case example



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The Women's Dermatologic Society (WDS) is a nonprofit physician organization that promotes mentorship and service in the Dermatology community. In the fall of 2013, the WDS had noted declining membership and engagement of dermatology residents and recent graduates. Mentorship during residency is associated with increased satisfaction, and participation in subspecialty societies leads to development of skills necessary to advocate for one's specialty (Flint et al., 2009; Freeman et al., 2008; Skelley et al., 2015). In order to identify possible gaps in communication and engagement with members, especially the younger physician demographics, the authors electronically surveyed the WDS membership from November 2013 through February 2014. The Institutional Review Board of Massachusetts General Hospital approved this study as an exempted study (Protocol Number: 2014P000379).

There was a 51% response rate composed of dermatologists (64%), trainees (31%), and dermatology researchers and corporate members (5%). The age distribution of respondents showed peaks in ranges of 31 to 35 years (29%) and 25 to 30 years (18%), reflecting capture of target demographics. Of respondents, 30% had not attended a WDS event that year. Furthermore, only 21% of respondents had participated in mentorship programs and 12% in service programs. The top reason cited for lack of participation was "unaware of activities/opportunities" (47%). Notably, 5% of respondents were unaware they were listed as WDS members, reflecting a phenotype of individuals who are participatory enough in nature to respond to email surveys and yet with whom the organization had not successfully communicated their membership status.

Mobile application (app) and social media use were queried, revealing that 93% of respondents owned iPhone-compatible devices and 90% used smartphones for professional activities. Over 70% of members and 84% of resident members stated they would use a WDS mobile app if one were available. For social media apps, 75% of respondents endorsed use, with Facebook being the most widely used platform. Nearly 70% of respondents used social media at least weekly, and 43% cited daily or multiple times per day usage. In response to

these results, the lead authors developed and released in March 2014 a free WDS iPhone app (Figure 1) that was able to streamline events and information. To boost member engagement with WDS social media profiles, a WDS Technology & Social Media Task Force (TSMTF) was also established during this period to expand outreach of the organization on multiple social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

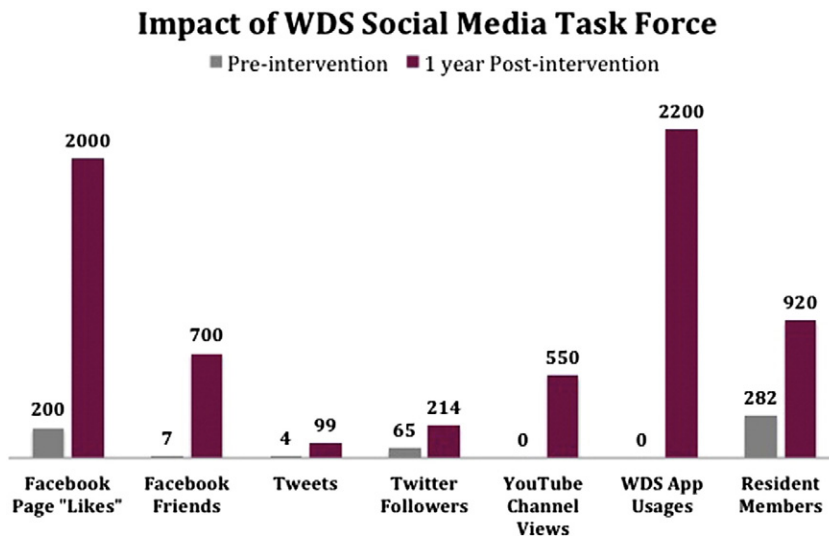
After 1 year of availability, the WDS app had been used over 2,200 times. The WDS Facebook page, which before the TSMTF had fewer than 200 subscribers, grew to over 2,000 subscribers. The WDS Twitter presence grew from 65 followers to greater than 200 followers. The WDS YouTube channel created by the lead author had, at 1 year, over 550 views. After the first year of these interventions, the WDS staff informed the authors that membership among residents and recent graduates more than tripled, rising from 282 to 920 members (Figure 2).

Other efforts that may have contributed to increased resident membership and engagement were also assessed. Invitations to the annual WDS luncheon at the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) annual meeting have been employed as a strategy for recruiting new resident members. Retrospective analysis of reports from WDS staff members regarding resident attendees of the 2014 AAD luncheon showed that the overwhelming majority of residents (>80%) who attended the WDS annual luncheon in 2014 and 2015 were already WDS members, indicating that current resident members value WDS luncheon attendance; however, it did not make a significant impact on outreach to new members. Also, according to WDS staff and the past-chair of the Young Physician's Task Force, there were no changes in recruitment practices with respect to invitations to the WDS luncheon during the experimental period, and so this variable in resident outreach efforts remained constant. Thus, there were no known changes in variables impacting resident outreach and engagement other than the interventions of the WDS app and the TSMTF during the experimental period.

In response to the 1-year follow up survey, more than 70% of residents reported that social media helped them engage with the WDS; meanwhile, 60% of residents reported that no person had directly reached out to them to join the organization. Also, 85% of

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**Figure 1.** The impact of WDS Social Media Task Force on various social media platforms and resident membership prior to intervention and 1 year after intervention.

residents did not serve on a committee. Of WDS app users, 92% reported the WDS iPhone app had helped them engage with the organization. These successful interventions to modernize communication and improve outreach to residents and young physicians by the WDS may serve as a model for other physician organizations to

improve membership and engagement in the resident and young physician demographics.

#### Take Home Points

- Resident and young physician members are important for physician organizations, as they can benefit uniquely from mentorship, networking, and community service opportunities, and they also ensure the longevity of an organization.
- Frequent social media and smart phone usage by dermatology residents and young physicians can be successfully utilized for outreach and engagement in a physician organization through a focused social media presence.
- A dedicated WDS mobile application that streamlined interaction with the organization and its website was highly utilized by some members, as reflected by both objective data of the number of usages tracked by internal analytics as well as self-reported app use on surveys.

#### Future Considerations

In many cases, residents who connected to the WDS through technology and social media were still waiting for personal outreach from mentors. In addition, many were not yet serving on a committee after they joined. Efforts must be made to solidify the connection and engagement of these resident members with the WDS so that they will remain involved post-residency.

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**Figure 2.** The WDS app as it appears for free download.

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