Our Future Workforce: Who, Where, Doing What?

The past 30 years have witnessed a remarkable increase in the knowledge base that supports dermatologic research and practice. Advances in molecular genetics, imaging, and a wide variety of other methodologies have led to an ever-increasing rate of progress in understanding normal and diseased skin, with consequent improvements in disease prevention and treatment strategies. As we contemplate an even more productive future for dermatologic research, however, we need to consider who will do this important work.

Who will decide which problems are scientifically most critical, which are most amenable to investigation at the moment, which should have highest societal priority? What backgrounds will these individuals bring to the task? By what criteria will their decisions be judged and by whom? Equally, we must consider not only who will make these high level decisions, but where they will be made—in academic centers, government facilities, pharmaceutical corporations, or biotech start-ups. While research will undoubtedly be performed in all these settings, the character and relative amount of investigation in each will be strongly influenced by professional and political leaders via various financial and other incentives. Clearly, each setting presents different strengths and limitations as well as different decision-making criteria.

At the hands-on-level, who will generate the data that fuel our progress? Where will they train? What preparation will they require and what career trajectories might they hope to follow in the various work environments?

Over the coming year, JID will publish editorials that focus on multiple aspects of this centrally important topic: our future workforce. We hope these articles will stimulate our readership to reflect on the complex issues that impact not only research productivity but the career satisfaction of many and ultimately skin health worldwide.

We hope that you, our reader, will share your own thoughts on these editorial topics.

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doi:10.1016/j.jid.2015.11.018