



Introduction

- The Internet is a popular resource for applicants researching fellowship programs.
- Despite its wide-spread use, there is no standardization of content, quality, and accessibility of training program information on the Internet.

Objective

- The purpose of this investigation was twofold: 1) to assess the accessibility of hand surgery fellowship websites and 2) to evaluate the quality of information provided via program websites.
- We hypothesized that fellowship websites would demonstrate highly variable accessibility and poor quality in the presentation of program information online.

Methods

- The American Society for Surgery of the Hand (ASSH) Fellowship Program Directory was queried for review of American Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)-accredited hand surgery fellowship programs.
- Provided links to program websites were explored for accessibility and quality of information. Program website accessibility from outside the directory was assessed using a Google search. Accessible websites were reviewed for the presence of informational component criteria.
- Fellowship educational criteria included: didactic learning (lecture series), journal club, research requirements, call responsibilities, rotation schedule, operative case descriptions, office/clinic time, required meetings/courses, and list of teaching faculty.
- Fellowship recruitment criteria included: program description, application requirements, link to NRMP website, program contact email, current and/or past fellows, and salary.
- A χ^2 test was used to compare website accessibility between the ASSH Fellowship Program Directory and the Google search.

Fellowship Educational Criteria	N (%)
Didactic Learning	49 (68)
Journal Club	39 (54)
Research Requirements	54 (75)
Call Responsibilities	23 (32)
Rotation Schedule	27 (38)
Operative Case Descriptions	35 (49)
Office/Clinic Time	27 (38)
Meetings/Courses	15 (21)
List of Teaching Faculty	46 (64)

Table 1. Number of hand surgery fellowship websites presenting components of fellow education information (N=72).

Fellowship Recruitment Criteria	N (%)
Program Description	72 (100)
Application Requirements	70 (97)
Link to NRMP.org	20 (28)
Program Contact Email	61 (85)
Current/Past Fellows	23 (32)
Salary/Benefits	20 (28)

Table 2. Number of hand surgery fellowship websites presenting components of fellow recruitment information (N=72).

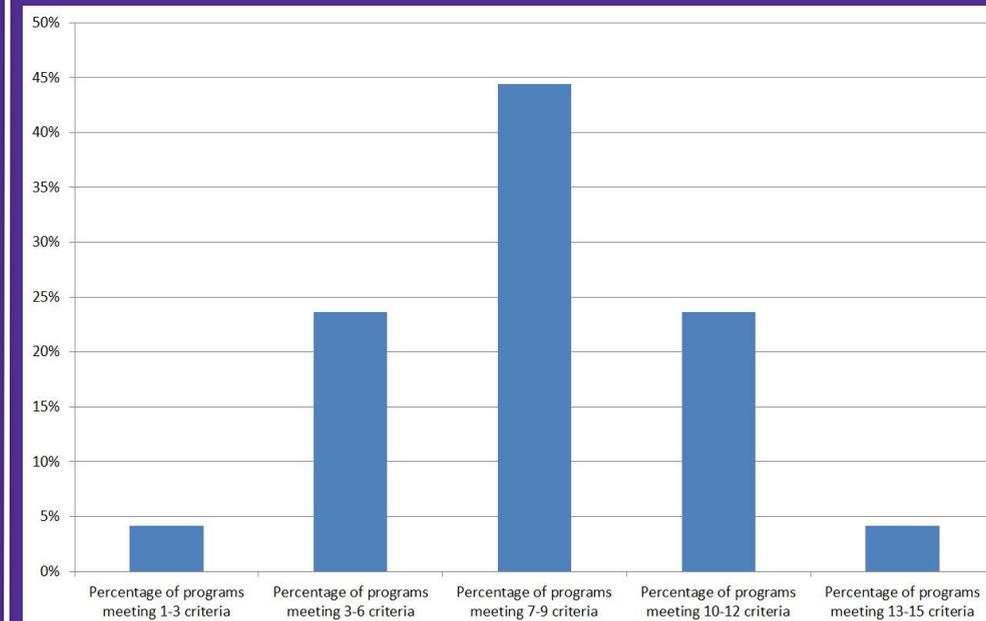


Figure 1. Proportion of hand surgery fellowship websites meeting fellow education and recruitment information criteria.

Results

- Eighty-one ACGME-accredited fellowship programs were initially identified for analysis.
- The ASSH Fellowship Program Directory contained a link to 72 program websites. Of the 72 websites, 11 links connected to non-functioning websites, 6 links connected to websites without program information, 29 links required multiple steps to access program information, and 26 links directly connected to program information.
- An independent Google search produced 70 direct links, demonstrating significantly more direct links to program websites than the ASSH Fellowship Program Directory (86% vs 32%; $P < 0.001$). Of the remaining 11 websites not accessible via the Google search, 2 were accessed via the ASSH Fellowship Program Directory for a total of 72 accessible program websites.
- Program description (100%), fellowship application requirements (97%), program contact email address (85%), and research requirements (75%) were the most commonly presented components of fellowship information (Tables 1 and 2).
- The quality of presented information varied greatly among the 72 accessible websites (Figure 1).

Conclusions

- Hand fellowship websites demonstrate highly variable accessibility with the vast majority of hand fellowship program information presented online being poor.
- Hand fellowship programs and professional societies should undertake efforts to ensure that fellowship applicants have access to high quality online program information.

References:

1. Goldfarb CA, Lee WP, Briskey D, Higgins JP. An American Society for Surgery of the Hand (ASSH) task force report on hand surgery subspecialty certification and ASSH membership. *J Hand Surg Am.* 2014 Feb;39(2):330-334.
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