



## Is Research the Future?

A MEDICAL STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DOING A RESEARCH YEAR PRIOR TO APPLYING FOR A PLASTIC SURGERY RESIDENCY

By Grace Tolan

"I don't think you have no chance of matching. I just think you should be really strategic to optimize chances and play the game a bit."

This was the sentence that catapulted my seven-month journey of searching for a research position. After five interviews, hundreds of unanswered emails, and over 30 rejections, I had one day to find what was supposed to be my key to matching into an integrated plastic surgery residency. With these failed efforts and an inevitable deadline, my advisor and I formulated a plan to piece together an application and forge forward with dual applying to plastic surgery and general surgery in the upcoming cycle. Fully committed to the plan, I spent the night researching programs trying to see where I would even have a chance of interviewing with my limited research background. The next day I was on my way home from the hospital listening to "3 Ways to Brainwash Yourself for Success & A More Meaningful Life," when I received a call from Dr. Claytor that would change this patchwork plan. He offered to take me on as a research fellow for the year without ever meeting me, and never having had a research fellow before, he was willing to take a chance on me. After a cross-country drive from Arizona to Pennsylvania, I arrived at the Claytor Noone Plastic Surgery clinic, where the real journey began. I started this position with some apprehension, skeptical of being able to "pump out applications and secure letters of recommendation from department chairs," as I had repeatedly been told was the entire purpose of this research year. This was even more critical as I was coming from a medical school without its own plastic surgery residency program. Here I was taking a position with one private practice



Dr. Barry Noone, Grace Tolan, and Dr. Brannon Claytor

cosmetic surgeon; again, no program and no research peers or PhD professors to help skyrocket my publication numbers. Having no idea what I had gotten myself into, I arrived in the OR on my second day where I watched my first abdominoplasty. That first week I was able to spend three full days in the OR, countless hours with Dr. Claytor, and had already started writing our first manuscript. I realized despite not doing research at a structured academic program, the experience I am gaining is something no other medical student is allotted. After spending the last three years confined to the "A, B, C, D" answer form with only one correct answer, I was forced to think in a streamlined manner. Through this experience, I have been able to tap back into my creative mindset and I have witnessed the importance of "thinking outside the box" in the clinical world. In one week, I had more exposure to plastic surgery than I had throughout my entire three years of medical school. This experience is truly unique as I am gaining an immense amount of

knowledge and exposure to aesthetic and cosmetic surgery, something even many residents don't get the privilege of observing. Though I may not spend my days with fellow research students, I have the unique opportunity to witness the integration of research and innovation into clinical practice, despite not being in an academic institution. I know this experience will influence my future career in a way that no publication has the ability to do. Every day I remind myself how lucky I am to witness Dr. Claytor instill confidence in patients through surgery, the core at my pursuit into this field. I am grateful Dr. Claytor took a chance on me and has provided me with such a rewarding experience. Speaking with other medical students, the majority of us who decide to take a research year have goals of flooding our CVs with as many publications as possible. However, over these past months I have quickly come to realize the mentorship and insurmountable exposure to the field are far more advantageous.



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