

Factors that Influence the Quality of Letters of Recommendation for Orthopaedic Trauma Fellowship Applicants: A Survey of Fellowship Directors

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INTRODUCTION: Letters of recommendation have been identified as one of the most important factors for interview selection and ranking applicants in the orthopaedic trauma fellowship match. There have been no previous investigations into what specific factors orthopaedic trauma fellowship program directors use to characterize an applicant unqualified for fellowship training and how this affects an applicant's letter of recommendation.

METHODS: A survey was sent to all 66 orthopaedic trauma fellowship program directors. Program directors were asked how they would respond to an applicant requesting a letter of recommendation who they deem unqualified for orthopaedic trauma fellowship training. Program directors were then presented with a list of 10 factors that may deem an applicant unqualified for orthopaedic trauma fellowship, which they ranked in order of importance. A weighted score was calculated for each factor. PDs were also given the opportunity to provide additional factors in a free response.

RESULTS:

The five-question survey yielded 42 responses from program directors (42/66 PDs; 64%). When faced with a request for a letter of recommendation from an 'unqualified' applicant, 22 program directors suggested they would not write a letter of recommendation for the applicant (52%), 19 program directors indicated they would write an underwhelming letter of recommendation (45%) and a single program director stated they would write a supportive letter of recommendation (2%). The highest-rated factors when deeming an applicant unqualified were lack of professionalism and personal responsibility. Low Orthopaedic In-Training Examination scores, lack of published research in specialty/subspecialty, and low total number of publications were ranked as the least important factors.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: Orthopaedic trauma fellowship program directors specifically identified lack of personal responsibility and professionalism as the most important factors when deeming an applicant 'unqualified' for fellowship training. Prior to requesting a letter of recommendation, applicants should prioritize personal responsibility and make every effort to display professionalism when building relationships with orthopaedic trauma faculty

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1. Do you intend to respond to this request?

2. If you intend to respond, how would you respond?

3. If you intend to respond, how would you respond? (Please provide a brief description of the factors that influenced your decision.)

4. If you intend to respond, how would you respond? (Please provide a brief description of the factors that influenced your decision.)

5. If you intend to respond, how would you respond? (Please provide a brief description of the factors that influenced your decision.)

