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Commentary: The changing role of the Thoracic Surgery Residents Association over time

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CENTRAL MESSAGE

The Thoracic Surgery Residents Association has played a major role in providing guidance to trainees since its inception in 1997. It has adapted its function as training has changed over time.

The Thoracic Surgery Residents Association (TSRA) is a robust and active organization led by trainees. As described by the current members of the TSRA in their article,¹ the TSRA was established in 1997 with a mission of representing the interests and needs of resident physicians in thoracic surgery specialty. The role and activity of the TSRA has expanded over the years, in concert with the changing nature of thoracic training programs.

The introduction of integrated thoracic programs has had a significant influence on the training structure for thoracic surgeons. The age and level of surgical experience of trainees has decreased significantly,² and the gap between faculty and junior thoracic residents has widened. A communication from the TSRA sent to a postgraduate year 6 through 8 in 1997 would likely focus on very different ideas than an e-mail message sent to a

postgraduate year 1 during 2020. The authors address the role of the TSRA in reducing this gap and acclimating young trainees to become better able to succeed during their training. TSRA offers online publications targeting young trainees, mentorship by senior residents at multiple institutions, and a variety of social media podcasts and programming. Although there has been a high level of satisfaction expressed by integrated program residents with their programs,³ supporting their training with help from organizations like the TSRA will maximize the benefit of training.

In addition, the ongoing pandemic has shown that the use of virtual conferencing will play a pivotal role in training over the next decade. The TSRA has responded by scheduling multiple virtual meetings this year. To assist students who are applying to thoracic surgery training programs, the

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TSRA is planning meet-and-greet sessions to answer questions applicants may have about the process. Given that applicants at institutions without training programs will not be able to do away rotations this year, the efforts by the TSRA will be important to give those applicants a fair chance during the match process. It has been shown that using virtual means to correspond with trainees during the pandemic can be effective.⁴

Sharing the knowledge, experience, and mindset of members of the TSRA will be helpful for these applicants and current trainees. Providing an environment for bidirectional communication is important and among the best attributes of the TSRA. Although many organizations provide advice to students and residents, having guidance from a group of similar-aged, current trainees allows for a different perspective and level of mentorship.

The TSRA has accomplished significant achievements since 1997, and has been able to adapt as the paradigm of thoracic surgery training has shifted during the past 2 decades. Continuing to adapt will be important for the organization over the next several decades.

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