and its continued evaluation, such as a standardized curriculum and creation of an alumni mentorship network. In addition, questionnaires administered immediately after the program would increase representation and accuracy, and long-term follow-up would help determine which aspects of the program are most impactful. As a specialty, we could then continue to invest in increasingly effective programs.

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Commentary: Test drive in cardiothoracic surgery

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Exposure to cardiothoracic surgery is limited in both medical school and general surgery residency, and a lack of exposure can lead to a poor perception and decreased interest in the field.¹ Current projections suggest that by 2025 there will be a shortage of at least 1500 cardiothoracic surgeons, or 25% of the projected need.²

Due to the decreased interest and increased need, there have been many programs and scholarships designed to increase exposure and experience to cardiothoracic surgery.² A decade ago, the American Association for Thoracic Surgery (AATS) took on this challenge with the implementation of an 8-week summer intern scholarship for medical students. This scholarship serves to provide valuable early clinical exposure to cardiothoracic surgery and offer longitudinal mentorship.

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CENTRAL MESSAGE

Early exposure to cardiothoracic surgery and longitudinal mentorship are the cornerstones to develop medical students' interest into a successful career in surgery.

Chan and colleagues³ eloquently describe the over-a-decade experience with more than 680 applicants to the AATS Summer Intern Scholarship. During the 8-week internship, 88% of the medical students had weekly operating room experience, and the majority interacted with their sponsoring surgeons on a weekly basis.

Beyond just clinical observation, the scholars were paired with a cardiothoracic surgeon who could act as a mentor. A survey of North American general surgery residents has shown that mentorship plays a strong role in promoting interest in the field.⁴ A separate survey of general surgery

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program graduates showed that 72% of the respondents were in the same field as their mentors.⁵ Mentees were influenced by mentors' expertise in the field, being a role model, and professional integrity.⁵ Mentorship offers these awardees an opportunity to clarify their concerns about a career in cardiothoracic surgery, to improve networking opportunities, and to have someone to offer overall career advice. As noted by the authors, the majority of the awardees highly valued the mentorship they received from this scholarship. Undoubtedly, this scholarship helped these awardees shape their career path, as reflected by the fact that 92% of the awardees highly recommend this scholarship in the questionnaire. Ultimately, 15% of them chose to pursue cardiothoracic surgery, which is greater than the percentage of general surgery residents who decide to pursue cardiothoracic surgery.

Through clinical exposure and mentorship, the AATS Summer Intern Scholarship has made a valuable impact in

many medical students' career journey. In general, increasing access to mentors, regardless of the ultimate career choice the awardees chose, is an important and valuable key to educating and enhancing the next generation of surgeons.

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