

## Resident Perception of a Newsletter's Impact on Residency Morale and Collegiality

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### *Abstract*

**Study Objective:** While several residency programs have created residency newsletters, no study has evaluated resident perception of a newsletter's impact. The objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of a newly implemented residency newsletter on resident morale and attitude toward fellow residents.

**Methods:** At a Midwestern PGY1-3 emergency medicine residency program, a four-page monthly newsletter was implemented in April of 2005. The newsletter included features on residents, stories on residency events, and information on upcoming events. The newsletter was designed as a resident project in which residents contributed stories and photos. Content and editorial decisions were independent of residency faculty. Ten months after implementation of the newsletter, the program's residents were surveyed to assess the newsletter's impact on their morale and attitude toward fellow residents. They also reported their interest in participating as a formal newsletter staff and they provided their opinion on faculty oversight. The survey was conducted anonymously, was distributed in both paper and electronic forms, and was based on a five-point Likert scale (1-negative, 5-positive).

**Results:** Of the 37 eligible residents, 32 (86.5%) responded to the survey; 84.6% of PGY-3 residents, 83% of PGY-2, and 91.6% of PGY-1 residents participated. When asked to rate the newsletter's impact on their general morale, the mean rating for all residents was 4.6 (range 2-5, standard deviation 0.64, median 4). PGY-3 residents' mean rating was 4.7, PGY-2 mean was 4.5, and PGY-1 mean was 4.6. Residents were asked to rate the newsletter's impact on their attitudes toward fellow residents; the mean rating for all residents was 4.7 (range 3-5, standard deviation 0.53, median 4). PGY-3 residents' mean rating was 4.7, PGY-2 was 4.7, and PGY-1 was 4.6. When asked if they would be willing to contribute to the newsletter as part of a formal staff, 53% of residents responded "yes"; 27% of PGY-3, 60% of PGY-2, and 70% of PGY-1 answered "yes." Residents were queried as to whether they would like more faculty oversight of the newsletter; no residents (0%) responded "yes." 100% of residents (32/32) stated that they read the newsletter monthly.

**Conclusion:** In a relatively large Midwestern PGY-1-3 emergency medicine residency program, nearly all residents perceived a monthly residency newsletter as having a positive impact on their general morale and on their attitudes toward fellow residents. Most junior residents were interested in joining a formal newsletter staff, and residents unanimously expressed their interest in maintaining the independent format of the newsletter. While results will vary across programs, a residency newsletter may be a relatively inexpensive means of improving resident morale and positively impacting residents' attitudes toward their colleagues.

Medical educators have focused significant attention in recent years on the subject of medical resident satisfaction. Much of this research has been prompted by the ACGME duty hours reforms and their goal of improving resident satisfaction and reducing fatigue.<sup>1-5</sup> Additional research has evaluated resident satisfaction with the intent of improving medical student selection of their specialty and residency program.<sup>6-8</sup>

Studies of residency programs have found that resident satisfaction and attitudes play a primary role in medical students' preference for programs.<sup>7-8</sup> Across specialties, additional research has shown that residents consider their relationships with their colleagues to play a primary role in their satisfaction with residency and career choice.<sup>9-12</sup>

A task force on medical education identified resident morale as a primary focus of improvement in resident education and proposed programs to enhance morale as a means of improving professionalism among residents.<sup>13</sup> Studies have evaluated additional factors' effects on improving morale, such as reduction in duty hours, anger management, and relationships with attending physicians.<sup>14-18</sup>

While several residency programs have implemented residency newsletters as a means of communication within their programs, to date no studies have evaluated the effect of these newsletters on resident morale and collegiality. This study evaluated the effect of a newly implemented newsletter on the collegiality and morale among residents in an emergency medicine residency program.

## Methods

The setting for the study was the Ohio State University emergency medicine residency program. The residency is three years (PGY-1-3 format) and, at the time of the study, had 38 residents. The program has undergone significant expansion in recent years, from eight residents per year to twelve residents over the past four years. The current program represents the largest the program has been, due to two additional residents who joined the residency.

Residents come from various backgrounds. Residents attended medical schools in 15 different states; 29% of residents are female. Residents claim as their hometowns cities in 16 different states. Graduates typically pursue employment in geographically diverse regions of the country; members of the class of 2006 signed contracts in at least 7 different states, spread across all geographic division of the United States, as well as New Zealand.

The residency program previously did not have a newsletter dedicated to resident features and events. As an emergency medicine residency program, with residents' varying schedules and off-service rotations, residents' principal time for interaction with their emergency medicine colleagues was during weekly didactic sessions and monthly journal clubs. The residency program had started a quarterly newsletter one year prior to the study, which administrators distributed to residents and alumni. This newsletter focused principally on department news and faculty features, rather than resident features and events.

In April 2005, the program started a resident newsletter as a resident project. The newsletter initially started as a two-page format with information on resident events, then was expanded two months later to a four-page format. Troy Madsen, this paper's first author, created and edited the newsletter. Residents contributed to the newsletter with photos, reports on residency events, advice to junior residents, and features on residents.

The residency program produced the newspaper monthly, and each edition included a feature on one of the program's residents, information on upcoming residency and community events, reports on residency events from the previous month, and photos of residents and events. Other features, such as advice for rotations and informal resident surveys, appeared periodically in the newsletter. Residents created and distributed the newsletter independent of faculty oversight; the newsletter was made available to faculty, but editorial decisions and content were at the discretion of residents. A formal newsletter staff had not been created during the study period, as the editor solicited articles from residents and all residents had the opportunity to submit photos, announcements, articles, etc.

Nine months after implementing the residency newsletter, in February 2006, residents received with the newsletter a paper survey with several questions evaluating their perception of the newsletter. Residents also received a copy of the survey by email. The survey contained questions based on a Likert scale, from 1-negative to 5-positive, in which they were asked to evaluate the newsletter's impact. Additionally, the survey contained yes/no questions and questions with free-text responses.

All efforts were made to ensure anonymity of the survey; in cases where residents returned the survey via email, the authors printed the survey without identifying information, and grouped this with the additional anonymous paper surveys. Resident responses received during the month of February, after publication of the February newsletter and prior to publication of the March newsletter, were eligible for inclusion in the study.

Results were calculated for responses from individual classes as well as for the entire program. Standard deviations were calculated for responses for the entire program.

## Results

Of the 37 eligible residents, 32 (86.5%) responded to the survey. Individual class response rates were 84.6% (11/13) of PGY-3 residents, 83% (10/12) of PGY-2, and

PGY-1	PGY-2	PGY-3
91.6%	83%	84.6%

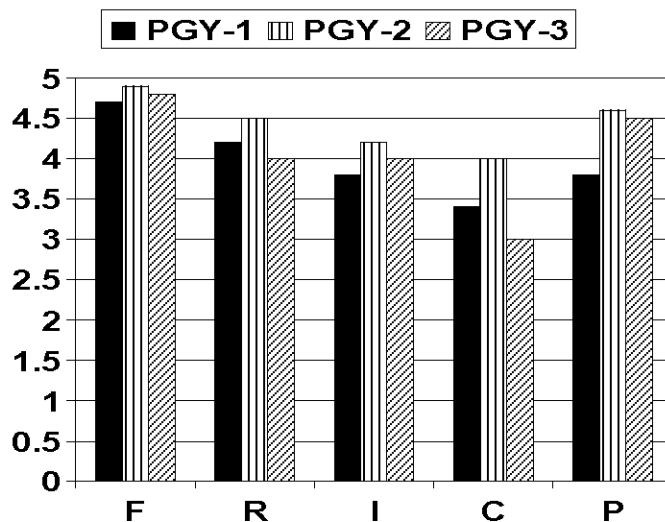
**Table 1: Survey participation rates by class**

91.6% (11/12) of PGY-1 residents.

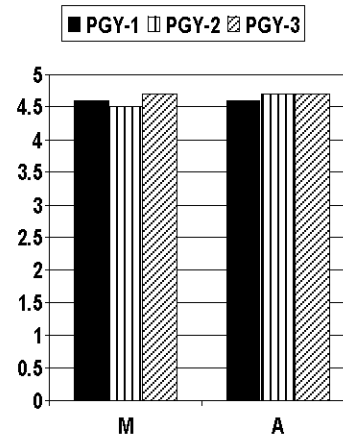
Using a Likert response scale from 1-negative to 5-positive, residents were asked to rate the newsletter's effect on their general morale. The mean rating for all residents was 4.6 (range 2-5, standard deviation 0.64, median 4). PGY-3 residents' mean rating was 4.7, PGY-2 mean was 4.5, and PGY-1 mean was 4.6.

Also using a Likert scale from 1-negative to 5-positive, the survey asked residents to rate the newsletter's impact on their attitudes toward fellow residents. The mean rating for all residents was 4.7 (range 3-5, standard deviation 0.53, median 4). PGY-3 residents' mean rating was 4.7, PGY-2 was 4.7, and PGY-1 was 4.6.

Residents were also asked to grade specific aspects of the newsletter using a scale from 1-low to 5-high. Residents gave the highest ratings to the newsletter's features on residents, with ratings for PGY-3 of 4.8, PGY-2 of 4.9, and PGY-1 of 4.7. Additional questions requesting ratings on reports on residency events, information on upcoming events, a column written by the chief residents, and photos all received positive ratings from the residents.



**Figure 2:** Resident ranking of newsletter features on a scale from 1-low to 5-high (F: features on residents, R: Reports on residency events, I: Information on upcoming events, C: Chief residents' column, P: Photos)



**Figure 1:** Resident perception of the newsletter's impact on morale (M) and attitude (A) on a Likert scale from 1-negative to 5-positive.

When asked if they would be willing to contribute to the newsletter as part of a formal staff, 53% of residents responded "yes": 27% of PGY-3, 60% of PGY-2, and 70% of PGY-1 answered "yes." Residents were queried as to whether they would like more faculty oversight of the newsletter; no residents (0%) responded "yes." all residents (32/32) stated that they read the newsletter monthly.

### Discussion

As educators have given the subject of resident satisfaction significant attention, a newsletter may be a relatively inexpensive means to improve resident collegiality and morale, both factors which previous studies have cited as important to their satisfaction and career choice. Actual cost for production of the newsletter included only paper and copying costs, as residents were able to use materials (computers, digital camera) available through the department or already in their possession.

According to this study, residents reported a positive impact of

a newsletter on their morale and on their attitude toward fellow residents. Such an impact may be attributable to the features on residents in the newsletter as well as the sense of collegiality created by the production of a residency newsletter, although these factors were not evaluated in the survey. The lowest marks in the survey went to the chief residents' column, which may have related more to the less-frequent nature of the section than the actual content, as the chief residents had written only three columns during the study period.

Residents appreciated the independent nature of the newsletter, as the paper was created and produced by residents without faculty oversight or review. Residents voted unanimously to maintain this format. In its resident-directed format, the newsletter allowed residents to learn and demonstrate competence in communication skills and other core competencies.

Limitations of the study include the small sample size as well as the focus only on an emergency medicine residency program. The impact of a newsletter in smaller programs may be less remarkable, as residents may already be fairly well acquainted with one another. Additionally, the inherent nature of an emergency medicine residency, with the residents' varying schedules and off-service rotations, may have increased the perception of the newsletter's impact by providing a sense of unity to residents who may have otherwise felt somewhat disconnected from their colleagues.

The study faced limitations in the outcomes measured, as well. The survey measured the residents' perception of their morale and collegiality; ideally, the study would have evaluated more objective measures, such as complaints filed with residency administration, response to residency changes, or participation in residency events. The one-time cross-sectional nature of the survey introduces an additional limitation, as residents relied on their memory of residency morale and collegiality prior to the newsletter's implementation in order to evaluate the newsletter's impact on these factors. Finally, other residency changes within the study period may have had a confounding effect on the residents' morale and collegiality.

## Conclusion

In a Midwestern three-year emergency medicine residency program, a newly implemented newsletter had a positive impact on residents' perception of their morale and attitude toward fellow residents. Residents were unanimous in their desire to maintain an independent format for the newsletter. A majority of junior residents ex-

pressed interest in being part of a formal newsletter staff. Program directors, chief residents, and residents in various residency training programs may wish to consider implementation of a newsletter as a relatively inexpensive means of positively impacting morale and collegiality among residents.

Additional study of the newsletter's impact may focus on objective measures, such as use of the newsletter to improve resident participation in events such as residency recruitment and new resident orientation. The authors would also like to further explore the role of the newsletter in enhancing the development of core competencies, such as communication skills, among the program's residents. A survey of residency programs to determine the prevalence and residency success with program newsletters may provide additional information on the use and potential for residency newsletters.

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