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**#DermTwitter and digital mentorship in the COVID-19 era**



*To the Editor:* We enjoyed reading Fernandez et al<sup>1</sup> recent article regarding virtual mentorship in the COVID-19 era. The authors described the challenges to obtaining mentorship in dermatology, provided a list of pre-existing mentorship programs, and offered novel suggestions for creating virtual mentorship opportunities for medical students interested in dermatology. We applaud Fernandez et al<sup>1</sup> for contributing their viewpoint to this increasingly important topic.

Beyond the formally structured mentorship programs outlined by Fernandez et al,<sup>1</sup> we would also like to highlight the microblogging website Twitter as another means of facilitating meaningful mentor-mentee relationships in dermatology. Twitter is a social media platform in which users post public messages (“tweets”) no longer than 280 characters, often accompanied by hashtags (key words or phrases prefaced with the “#” symbol), in order to open discussions on a topic of interest or to identify like-minded virtual communities.<sup>2</sup> Given the democratization of the World Wide Web,<sup>3</sup> we believe that mentorship through Twitter is not only a viable but also an inevitable alternative to traditional forms of mentorship.

For example, the Dermatology Journal Club (@DermatologyJC) on Twitter has amassed over 3300 followers (as of February 15, 2021) who engage in a monthly question-and-answer live-tweet session aimed at “stimulat(ing) intellectual conversation between dermatologists (and those interested in dermatology...) from around the world.”<sup>4</sup> Trainees

publicly tweet in response to dermatologists during these sessions while engaging in a critical discourse of the literature, which may lead to the formation of professional connections in real time. The ability of trainees to then privately message potential mentors with whom they have interacted is an avenue through which mentorship may develop on Twitter.

Unlike traditional mentorship opportunities, including those identified by Fernandez et al,<sup>1</sup> in which mentor-mentee relationships are built in a formal context over an extended period of time, Twitter mentorship is less linear and more suited to individual needs. Any trainee may create a Twitter account and interact with potential dermatologist mentors on the platform, regardless of their year of training, home institution, or pre-existing professional connections. Additionally, it may be easier for trainees (especially those under-represented in dermatology)<sup>1</sup> to identify mentors with similar backgrounds and interests, as they are not limited to mentors from only their institution. These advantages may help optimize mentor-mentee fit.

We are not suggesting that Twitter mentorships replace the formal mentorship opportunities described by Fernandez et al.<sup>1</sup> Rather, we are advising dermatology trainees to use Twitter to augment the more traditional mentor-mentee relationships that they may develop. Potential mentorship opportunities in dermatology may be identified using the #DermTwitter hashtag (Table I). This mentorship may take several forms, including conventional program/scholarship applications, research collaborations, and “horizontal mentorship” from like-minded peers and junior colleagues.<sup>2,5</sup> Dermatology trainees may browse these

**Table I.** Representative examples of tweets about potential dermatology mentorship opportunities identified via the #DermTwitter hashtag

Type of mentorship opportunity	Example
Under-represented in medicine outreach	“For any dermatologists currently interested in mentoring minority students, please help me fill out this form for the SNMA.* We are currently trying to compile a list of potential mentors for SNMA students!”
Research collaboration with dermatologists	“I am looking for a junior medical student with none-limited research experiences/opportunities that is interested in #SkinOfColor, #Hair disorders, and #Research to work on a short-term project. Please share with your networks.”
Information about dermatology as a specialty	“There are many of us in #DermTwitter (and also, tons of great #Dermatology mentors not on #SoMe <sup>†</sup> ) who would be thrilled to help colleagues at the medical school level and/or in other specialties with derm-specific information.”
Horizontal mentorship from peers	“#MedStudentTwitter interested in dermatology – thinking about pursuing a research year? Check out this extensive spreadsheet... to find a possible mentor/opportunity!”

SNMA, Student National Medical Association.

\*SNMA is an organization committed to supporting current and future under-represented minority medical students.

<sup>†</sup>Commonly used abbreviation for “social media.”

mentorship options and pursue those that meet their needs. The collective adjustment to remote work due to COVID-19 will support the continued importance of identifying pathways for digital mentorship. Deconstructing the traditional paradigms of face-to-face mentorship may allow dermatology trainees to succeed through virtual connections for the duration of the pandemic and beyond.

David X. Zheng, BA,<sup>a</sup> Kathleen M. Mulligan, BA,<sup>a</sup> and Jeffrey F. Scott, MD<sup>b</sup>

From the Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, Cleveland, Ohio;<sup>a</sup> and the Department of Dermatology, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, Maryland.<sup>b</sup>

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Correspondence to: David X. Zheng, BA, University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center, 11100 Euclid Ave, Cleveland, OH 44106

E-mail: [dxz281@case.edu](mailto:dxz281@case.edu)

Twitter: [@davidxzheng](https://twitter.com/davidxzheng)

#### Conflicts of interest

None disclosed.

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