Commentary

Commentary on: Who is Publishing in Facial Cosmetic Surgery? A Citation Analysis Across Specialties Over Five Decades

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“Who is Publishing in Facial Cosmetic Surgery? A Citation Analysis Across Specialties Over Five Decades” is a literature review of the articles published in facial cosmetic surgery over the past 5 decades. It provides a good analysis of the trends in published literature, both with respect to when the articles were published and interspecialty publication trends in publication.

The primary goal of this article is to analyze the most cited peer reviewed literature over the past five decades and to identify any publication trends across the four specialties of plastic surgery, otolaryngology, dermatology, and ophthalmology. The top 50 cited articles for each decade from the 1970s to 2010s were identified for the topics of facelift, rhinoplasty, browlift, and blepharoplasty using the Thomson/Reuters Web of Knowledge. The number of citations/article, first authors’ specialty affiliation, and journal specialty affiliation were measured and analyzed. Data were plotted graphically and publishing trends within specialties were analyzed.

As with any article, there are inherent biases in the approach to, and analysis of, the data. Specifically, this article approaches the literature from a plastic surgeon’s perspective, analyzing literature that is surgical only (not injectables, minimally invasive procedures, lasers, etc.). The search topics chosen are those from four aesthetic surgical procedures: facelift, rhinoplasty, browlift, and blepharoplasty. Literature on resurfacing procedures, facial implants, liposuction, fat augmentation, and other aesthetic procedures (such as bony genioplasty) were not searched or analyzed. A specialty such as dermatological surgery will not have published substantially on rhinoplasty or facelift procedures. Although some dermatologists and ophthalmologists perform aesthetic eyelid and lower facial surgery, interest in these facial procedures in dermatology and ophthalmology is recent, and literature contributions in these specialties can only reflect this recent incorporation into residency training.

Another important deficiency in this review is that it fails to account for the surgeon denominator (number of surgeons that could or would potentially perform a given surgery). For example, although there are a large number of ophthalmologists in the country and the world, the number that perform blepharoplasty on a regular basis is relatively low (American Society of Ophthalmic Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery membership is approximately 550). Therefore, the number of blepharoplasty articles written by oculoplastic surgeons will likely be less than the number written by plastic surgeons. The same is true for rhinoplasty, when considering the number of general otolaryngologists vs facial plastic surgeons who perform rhinoplasties. The article states “With regards to first authorship, Plastic Surgery had the highest percentage across all surgeries at every time point, except for rhinoplasty from 2010-present, when Otolaryngology had a higher percentage (48% vs 40%). The fact that Plastic Surgery (as a specialty) has more facelift publications than does dermatology is likely
not significant, as most dermatologists do not perform face-lift procedures. However, the trends in publishing are significant, and reflect training, interest, and general specialty involvement. This article would be improved by expressing the denominators (by specialty) that could perform a given procedure.

The final criticism of this article is that it observes the literature from the perspective of plastic surgery, and the competition that exists for the specialty. "However, it appears that the competition from non-plastic surgeons observed in clinical practice is being mirrored in the area of journal publications." This bias can obscure the real importance of this review, which is to analyze the publications in aesthetic facial surgery, and to observe the trends related to these publications. The future of academic medicine and evidence-based medicine is collaboration between specialties, rather than a spirit of competition. Cross-fertilization of ideas and education, and sharing from our divergent backgrounds will only make us better. While it is important that an article such as this explores trends in publishing, it is also to view from afar and realize that the goal of medical literature is to promote education and hopefully better patient care.

This article is excellent in that it studies the literature published by different specialties in aesthetic facial surgery over time. It is important to understand any biases that readers have when evaluating a given article, and in this case, the biases that exist from analysis of the existing literature. The authors are to be commended on their study of the existing literature; the reader is always to be cautioned on how they read the literature.

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