

Education

GOOGLE INTERNET SEARCHES ON RESIDENCY APPLICANTS DO NOT FACILITATE THE RANKING PROCESS

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Abstract—Background: Information used by program directors (PDs) to evaluate and rank residency applicants is largely limited to the Electronic Residency Application Service and the interview day. The Internet represents a potential source of additional data on applicants. Recent surveys reveal that up to 90% of United States (US) companies are already using the Internet to post jobs and to screen candidates. However, its use in residency applicant evaluation is not well studied. **Objective:** We hypothesize that the Internet, through the use of a Google search, will provide useful information to PDs in ranking applicants. **Methods:** This prospective observational study was completed by six Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education–accredited Emergency Medicine residency programs. After the interview process, programs formed their rank order list in their usual fashion. Then participating programs performed a Google search on applicants from their list. A standardized search was used and information reviewed was limited to the first two Google pages. The main outcome measure was change in an applicant's status on the rank order list. Change in status was based on the judgment of the individual program's PD. **Results:** A total of 547 applicants were reviewed. The time for review of information was 4,386 min total and a mean of 7.2 min per resident. Position

on the rank order list was changed for three applicants; two moved up on the list and one moved down. Four programs made no changes. No applicants were removed. **Conclusions:** The Internet, through the use of a Google search, did not appear to provide useful information in a time-effective manner to PDs in ranking applicants. © 2013 Elsevier Inc.

Keywords—Internet; job application; match; resident education

INTRODUCTION

The ease and speed of the Internet has revolutionized the accessibility of information, but users often find navigating the ever-expanding online resources challenging. Google's search engine is the most widely used in the United States (US). It fields several hundred million search requests daily and had >1 billion unique visitors in the month of May 2011 (1). The Internet has also enabled new ways of human interactions via social

Table 1. Time Spent Conducting Google Internet Search and Impact on the Rank List

Location	No. Reviewed	Total Time (min)	Time/ Applicant	No. of Changes	
A	55	390	7.09	1	Down 26 spots
B	234	2280	9.74	0	
C	52	416	8.00	0	
D	100	700	7.00	0	
E	56	360	6.43	2	Up 12 and 20 spots
F	50	240	4.80	0	
Total	547	4386	8.02	3	
Mean	91.17	731	7.18		
SD	72.46	773.90	1.64		
Median	55.5	403	7.05		

SD = standard deviation.

networking sites. These sites allow individuals to share their personal experiences freely with friends, family, and the general public. Social media is now so pervasive in our culture that about half the US population reportedly partakes in social networking sites (2).

Accordingly, corporate recruiters are now using the Internet and social networking sites as tools in the employment decision-making process. It has been reported that up to 90% of large US companies use the Internet and social media sites to not only post job openings but also to identify and screen potential job candidates (3,4). Two out of three hiring managers and job recruiters have rejected candidates based on information they found online; an almost equal number have hired a candidate based on their online profile (4). One company that specializes in physician recruitment for hospitals has been using the Internet and social networking sites as part of its due diligence check and basing decisions to offer jobs on the information discovered (5).

Applying for an Emergency Medicine residency position mirrors in part the employment application process in the corporate world. Applicants submit a "standard" resume, called the Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS) application. Selected applicants are then met for face-to-face interviews. To our knowledge, the use of the Internet to supplement ERAS and the interview in the evaluation of residency applicants has not been studied previously. We hypothesize that the Internet, through the use of a Google search, will provide useful and timely information to program directors (PDs) in assessing and ranking applicants.

METHODS

This prospective observation study was completed by six Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education–accredited Emergency Medicine Programs. After the

2010–2011 interview season was concluded, each program compiled their rank order list (ROL) in their usual fashion. Once the ROL was finalized but not yet submitted to the ERAS, each PD performed an Internet search on the applicants in descending order of the ROL. A standardized search on the Google search engine was applied using the applicant's first and last name, demographic information, and medical school. PDs were limited to reviewing search results on the first two Google pages, but could access any number of additional links within each search result. We used two Google pages because, in our judgment and experience, these pages contained the most pertinent and important information.

The main outcome measure was the number of applicants whose rank status in the ROL was changed due to information gathered from the Google search. Change in rank status was at the discretion of each PD. All PDs had at least 4 years of experience in evaluating and ranking applicants for the residency match.

RESULTS

A Google search was performed on a total of 547 applicants (Table 1). The total time for the search and review of information was 4,386 min. The mean search time on each applicant grouped by location was 7.2 ± 1.6 min (range: 4.8–9.7 min).

Of the 547 applicants who were reviewed, only (0.5%) were moved on the ROL. Two were moved up on the ROL, one was moved 12 spots and the other was moved 20 spots; and the third applicant's rank was lowered by 26 spots. According to the PD, the 2 applicants were moved higher within the top 50 applicants due to information on the Google search that demonstrated extensive and notable involvement of activities listed on the ERAS application. The Google search for the applicant who was lowered in rank revealed information that prompted the PD to question the applicant's overall judgment. This applicant was moved out of the top 50 applicants. Four of the six programs did not change their ROL after Internet searches. No applicants were removed totally from the ROL. These changes had no apparent effect on match results.

DISCUSSION

To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine whether information found on an Internet search would alter the ROL of residency programs. The results found that the ROL was changed for <1% of applicants reviewed. Only 1 applicant among 547 was lowered in the ROL, and 2 others were raised. In this study, a Google Internet search did not substantially impact the ROL.

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