

Attending Surgeons as Teachers: What the Residents Want

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Purpose: This study was designed to evaluate faculty characteristics that are valued most by residents. The study addressed personal and professional aspects of surgical faculty that residents consider important when evaluating their best teachers, with particular focus on male versus female respondents.

Methods: A twenty-nine question survey was distributed to all plastic surgery residents and fellows. Survey results were recorded anonymously and analyzed collectively, and according to gender, age, program type, and career plans.

Results: 148 survey responses were obtained. 66% of respondents were male, and 33% female. 86% were from integrated programs. 60% were PGY level 1-4, while 40% were senior residents or fellows. 74% of respondents prefer teaching faculty to be flexible based on resident input and intraoperative events when planning for a surgical case. While 82% prefer informal didactic teaching, with a clear separation of teacher from student, 72% prefer interaction outside of teaching sessions or cases to be casual with some career focus. Overall, females prefer a more casual teaching environment, but desire a greater patient-focused approach in the operating room versus resident-benefit. Male residents and those planning to enter private practice, on the other hand, favor an operative approach focused more on resident benefit. The most important skills residents want to learn from teachers are: clinical judgment, operative technique, and clinical diagnostic skills. Abilities in grant and manuscript writing, basic laboratory skills, and bedside manner were of less value. Reputation, research background, and national connections are the most highly valued professional characteristics, while practice type, years in practice, and gender are of less importance. Approachability and teaching style ranked highly among residents as important personal qualities in a teacher, and females found approachability a more valuable characteristic than did males.

Conclusions: From the resident perspective, the best faculty educator is someone who is approachable, delivers case-oriented lectures and initiates didactics outside of required core conferences. This faculty member also actively participates in all program activities and conferences, has significant national connections with a national reputation, and possesses outstanding operative skills. Residents, particularly males and those planning a career in private practice, prefer that cases be performed with an emphasis on resident benefit.