Publication Times and Integrated Plastic Surgery Applicant Planning

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Integrated plastic surgery is one of the most competitive residencies, with 57% of applicants matching in 2021.[1] Research productivity is a shared feature of applicants with matched US MD seniors producing 19.1 abstracts, presentations, and publications compared with 11.5 for unmatched seniors in 2020.[1] This reflects a substantial increase from only 3.4 for matched applicants in 2007.[2] In this Viewpoint, we will analyze publication times in a major plastic surgery journal pre and post-pandemic, with the goal of determining how early applicants must start plastics research to be competitive, taking these contemporary publication cycle times into account.

As per Chawla et al, 35 articles published between January 1, 2019, and November 1, 2021, in *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* were chosen at random. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* was selected as it is the highest impact factor journal in the specialty with an impact factor of 4.763. One original research article per monthly issue was reviewed. Articles accepted before March 2020 were categorized as "pre-COVID," between March 2020 and August 2020 as "quarantine," and September 2020 to the present as "postquarantine." Two-tailed T-testing assessed differences. Mean submission-to-acceptance time significantly increased from 30.97 weeks pre-COVID to 56.80 weeks postquarantine ($P < 0.05$), whereas acceptance-to-publication time significantly decreased from 32.67 to 25.59 weeks (see Table 1).

Submission-to-acceptance times were analyzed separately from submission-to-publication times, as applicants can list accepted work as publications in ERAS and PSCA applications. Further, in 2018, *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* was found to have a mean acceptance-to-publication time of 25.8 weeks, longer than the mean among all plastic surgery journals in 2018 of 10.32 weeks.[3] The same study reported a

Table 1. Mean Submission-to-acceptance and Acceptance-to-publication Times for January 2019 to November 2021 Issues of *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*

	Mean Submission-to-acceptance Time, wk (SD)	Mean Acceptance-to-publication Time, wk (SD)
Pre-COVID (n = 21)	30.97 (10.24)	32.67 (8.26)
Quarantine (n = 6)	38.10 (9.79)	29.64 (4.80)
Postquarantine (n = 8)	56.80 (21.46)*	25.59 (4.34)*

*Significant ($P < 0.05$) difference between value and respective pre-COVID value.

mean submission-to-acceptance time of 23.3 weeks for *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* and 21 weeks for all plastic surgery journals, suggesting this metric is more generalizable.

Overall, our data suggest that article submission-to-acceptance time postquarantine is greater than 1 year. This trend is supported by a selection of general journals, which demonstrated a significantly longer submission-to-acceptance time postquarantine compared with articles from 2019 at 91.35 and 75.79 days, respectively.[4] This trend is exacerbated in plastic surgery journals, which significantly lag compared to other surgical subspecialty journals with median submission-to-publication time in 2018 of 208 days versus 22.1, respectively.[3]

With Step 1 transitioning from numerical to pass/fail scoring in 2022, further emphasis will be placed on research.[5] We recommend expressing an interest in plastic surgery 2 years before applications are due. This is early M2 year for the average US senior and allows sufficient time to start multiple research projects and go through the submission-to-acceptance process in the postquarantine era. Further, we recommend research-related gap years be taken at least 2 years before the application cycle, if applicable (between M2 and M3 year) to allow for maximum publication productivity. A final consideration is for the applicant to look at publication cycle metrics/turnaround times of target journals before submission to best evaluate how these mesh with application cycle deadlines.

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DISCLOSURE

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