How would you promote Interventional Radiology as a specialty in the modern era?

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An effective promotion of any medical speciality should begin with a focus on the next generation of doctors; current medical students. Studies show that most students decide on what speciality they'd like to pursue at medical school (20%) or within 3 years of graduating (79.8%) (Harris, Gavel and Young, 2005). Unfortunately, medical students have little exposure to interventional radiology (IR) at medical school and surveys have demonstrated that 70% of students would prefer more (Alsafi et al., 2017). These numbers clearly exhibit that there is a scarcity in the exposure to IR throughout the medical student experience.

Marketing in the modern era is heavily focussed on social media. This is a powerful promotional tool which isn't being used to its full potential by most medical fields. The current generation of medical students, in particular, are very active on social media sites such as instagram, twitter and facebook. Systematic reviews have demonstrated that its use for medical education can be very effective (Cheston, Flickinger and Chisolm, 2013). Increased social media presence should be coupled with a student ambassador scheme in order to promote posts and social media pages, amongst university students and junior doctors. Modern marketing algorithms used by popular sites such as facebook, make the outreach of material to our target audience very easy. The future of surgery is minimal invasion; therefore I believe that IR should be marketed as the beacon of technological advancement in medicine.

The Society of Interventional Radiology has encountered significant success through their online campaigns. Their social media posts have seen widespread reach amongst medical societies and over 7 million views on tweets in 1 year (Rfs.sirweb.org, 2018). This can be replicated here in the UK. A few ideas for shareable content include: information about current procedures, interesting cases with images or videos, quizzes and questions, innovative new techniques, discussions about artificial intelligence within the field and advertisement for conferences or specialised taster events.

Taster events themselves can also be an effective method of promotion. Upon organising a session at UCL in association with Ethicon, which made use of laparoscopic simulators and discussed the DaVinci system, it was apparent that students greatly value hands on experience when exploring specialities. Tesche et al. have found that having experience with surgical simulators can significantly impact student interest in cardiothoracic surgery (and surgery in general) (Tesche et al., 2010). Currently, taster days do exist, however these can be expensive and often attract those students who are already interested in the field. I propose that medical and radiology societies throughout the country should be supported in holding free or subsidised taster events in which students get the opportunity to experience surgical simulators, virtual reality programmes and gain an understanding of IR directly from interventional radiologists themselves. Such methods would be most effective in both, reaching out to those who may never otherwise consider the field and in shaping the future of IR.

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