ININVOLVING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CARDIOVASCULAR SURGEONS
To the Editor:
The projected increase in cardiovascular patients, alongside the concerning perception of waning interest in thoracic and cardiovascular surgery, presents a critical challenge: How do we engage the next generation? Vogel and colleagues highlight interest groups as a critical first stepping stone to kindle student enthusiasm and provide a starter kit guide. Both the need for student initiative and faculty support are emphasized; students take the lead in organization and outlines, whereas surgeons and residents provide opportunities and guidance.

Considering that surgical specialties in general, and thoracic and cardiovascular surgery in particular, have always been known for long work hours, it might be that shared intergenerational passion for the field itself is crucial for a fulfilling career. The 20th century epitomized this passionate spirit, with cardiovascular surgeons such as Alexis Carrel, Nina Braunwald, and Michael DeBakey inspiring young talent with their relentless commitment. Aspiring surgeons found a magnetic pull toward thoracic and cardiovascular surgery, and in turn, the field, including its long hours and commitment, was equally alluring and fulfilling to them. The current generation of medical students appears to have different expectations, particularly concerning work-life balance and work ethic, which in turn influence their specialty choices.2,3

Nowadays, students’ initial interest in thoracic and cardiovascular surgery can be readily sparked by various means of exposure. Existing platforms like the Next Generation Webinar of the European Association for Cardio-Thoracic Surgery, interest groups as described by Vogel and colleagues, or more general associations such as the Dutch Surgical Society for Medical Students, offer a diverse range of options for students to explore their interests.

Transitioning to more hands-on involvement, which may significantly contribute to the long-term appeal and retention of individuals in thoracic and cardiovascular surgery, requires more active involvement of surgical mentors. Supporting activities such as clinical internships, research, and conference attendance relies on strong mentor-mentee relationships. These relationships develop over time and are crucial in nurturing professional growth and promoting collaboration, both of which are key to modern day surgery.4 In addition, mentorship facilitates the transmission of foundational values within the field, while also providing a platform to address the specific needs of young professionals.

Engaging future cardiovascular surgeons hinges on an intergenerational collaborative effort. Understanding the core appeal of thoracic and cardiovascular surgery, while recognizing changing needs and emphasizing the importance of commitment, is paramount. We firmly believe that, by actively involving and guiding medical students, we can ignite their passion and ensure a thriving and accessible future for thoracic and cardiovascular surgery.

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Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors reported no conflicts of interest.

The Journal policy requires editors and reviewers to disclose conflicts of interest and to decline handling or reviewing manuscripts for which they may have a conflict of interest. The editors and reviewers of this article have no conflicts of interest.

References

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jxoj.2024.05.012