

# Analysis of References on the Plastic Surgery In-Service Training Exam

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**Background:** The Plastic Surgery In-Service Training Exam is a knowledge assessment tool widely used during plastic surgery training in the United States. This study analyzed literature supporting correct answer choices to determine highest yield sources, journal publication lag, and journal impact factors.

**Methods:** Digital syllabi of 10 consecutive Plastic Surgery In-Service Training Exam administrations (2006 to 2015) were reviewed. The most-referenced articles, journals, and textbooks were determined. Mean journal impact factor and publication lag were calculated and differences were elucidated by section.

**Results:** Two thousand questions and 5386 references were analyzed. From 2006 to 2015, the percentage of journal citations increased, whereas textbook references decreased ( $p < 0.001$ ). *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* was cited with greatest frequency (38.5 percent), followed by *Clinics in Plastic Surgery* (5.6 percent), *Journal of Hand Surgery* (American volume) (5.1 percent), and *Annals of Plastic Surgery* (3.8 percent). There was a trend toward less publication lag over the study period ( $p = 0.05$ ), with a mean publication lag of  $9.1 \pm 9.0$  years for all journal articles. Mean journal impact factor was  $2.3 \pm 4.3$  and lowest for the hand and lower extremity section ( $1.7 \pm 2.8$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The highest yield textbooks were elucidated by section.

**Conclusion:** Plastic surgery faculty and residents may use these data to facilitate knowledge acquisition during residency. (*Plast. Reconstr. Surg.* 137: 1951, 2016.)

Questions on the Plastic Surgery In-Service Training Exam are written by committee members of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons and administered to residents and practicing surgeons in the United States. For residents, the Plastic Surgery In-Service Training Exam affords an opportunity for self-evaluation against a national norm and preparation for the boards.<sup>1</sup> For practicing surgeons, the Plastic Surgery In-Service Training Exam affords 30 continuing medical education credits and the opportunity to stay up-to-date with the latest advances in plastic surgery.<sup>2</sup> Trainees reasonably infer that tested material reflects the Society's vision for core curriculum training in plastic surgery. Given its ubiquitous presence among training programs in the United States, the Plastic Surgery In-Service

Training Exam has emerged as a cornerstone in plastic surgery resident education.

Nevertheless, despite its relevance to plastic surgery education, the Plastic Surgery In-Service Training Exam is understudied. Insights into the references recommended by question writers may be useful for faculty, residents, and test-takers. In addition, a list of classic articles, high-yield journals, and textbooks may be useful for curricular design and independent study.

The American Council for Graduate Medical Education defines medical knowledge as a core

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