

Did We Forget about Social Determinants of Health in Dermatology?

Elisabeth M. M. CHRISTENSEN¹ and Gregor B. E. JEMEC^{1,2}

¹Department of Dermatology, Zealand University Hospital, Sygehusvej 10, Roskilde, Denmark^{*,**} and ²Department of Clinical Medicine, Faculty of Health Science, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. E-mail: emey@regionsjaelland.dk

^{*}Member of the European Hidradenitis Suppurativa Foundation. ^{**}Member of the European Reference Network on Rare and Undiagnosed Skin Disorders.

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In the last decade, research on Social Determinates of Health (SDoH) has influenced most areas of medicine. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines SDoH as “the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life” (1). In 1998 the WHO quantified the impact of SDoH on health outcomes and disparities in healthcare (1). Dermatology is remarkably absent from the concept of SDoH. This is surprising, in view of the fact that skin diseases are highly social diseases, with an established occupational burden, and it may therefore be argued that dermatology should have pioneered research in SDoH. This, however, is not the case. We therefore call for research in SDoH in dermatology.

Estimates show that 50–90% of preventable mortality rates in the USA are determined by social factors rather than medical care (2). The field of SDoH is evolving. The determinants are obviously relevant to many of the

broad aspects of patients’ lives in dermatology, such as education, employment, status, income, housing, discrimination, etc. (1).

Substantial evidence supports a causal association between SDoH and health outcomes through both direct action and complex and interactive pathways (2). Current evidence similarly supports the association between SDoH and disease severity and outcomes even for some skin diseases, such as atopic dermatitis, psoriasis, hidradenitis suppurativa (HS) and melanoma (3). However, there is ample room for improvement through research.

We conducted a search in the database PubMed to compare the total number of studies on SDoH in each medical specialty. The search terms followed the template “SDoH AND [specialty]”, such as “SDoH AND Dermatology”. The ranking is shown in Table SI. Dermatology is the 30th of 35 specialties. To calculate the proportion of research in SDoH compared with the magnitude of total studies in each specialty a further search was performed using only the name of the specialty as a search term,

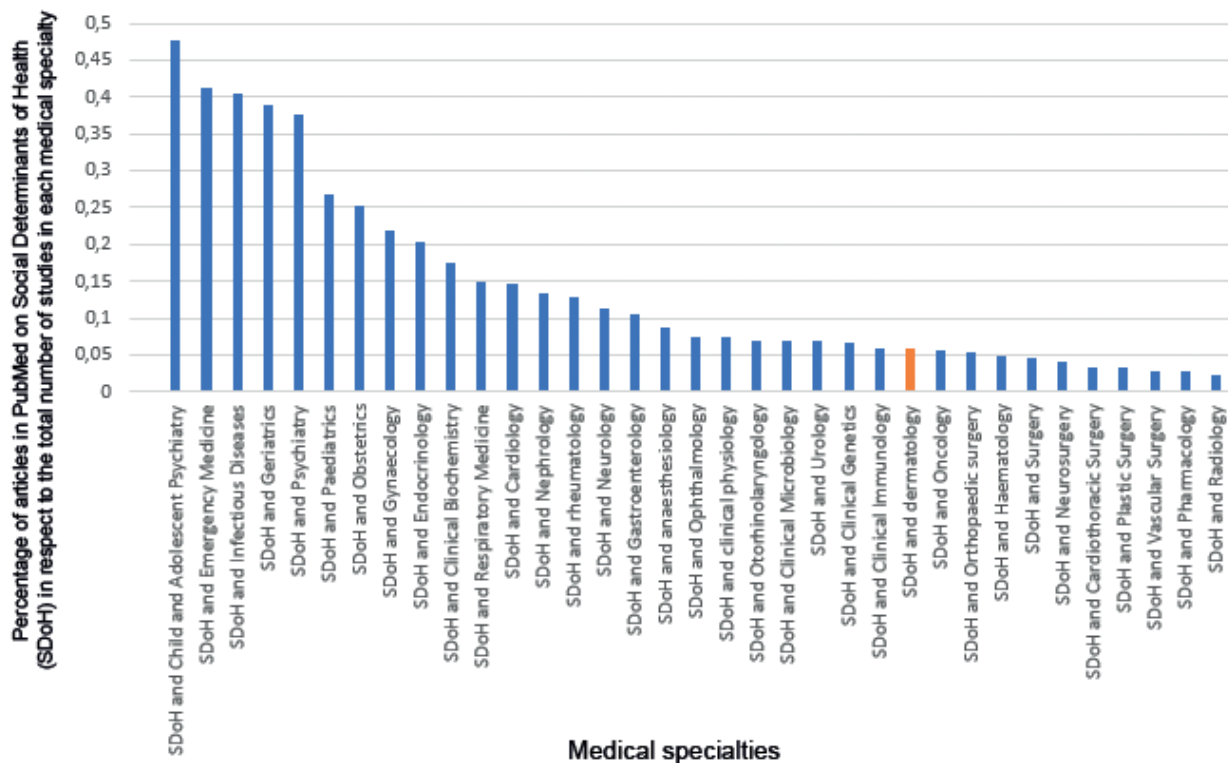


Fig. 1. Percentage of research in Social Determinates of Health (SDoH) in each medical specialty respective to the total number of studies in each specialty in PubMed.

e.g. “Dermatology” (Table SI). The national percentage of studies concerning SDoH was then calculated. Dermatology ranks in the bottom third (**Fig. 1**).

These simple observations are descriptions of the “competitive” situation and provide an impetus for further exploration of the topic.

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