An Analysis of the Top 150 Medical Podcasts in the United States

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ABSTRACT

Background

Over the last decade, Free Open Access Medical education (FOAM) podcasts emerged as a supplemental tool in medical education. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the need for quality, asynchronous educational options. Previous work suggests >85% of U.S medical students and residents listen to at least one medical podcast. (1) Published recommendations for creators are based on research investigating the response to specific podcasts, and preference surveys (2,3,4). Our project aimed to analyze the top 150 medical podcasts to identify areas of opportunity, and to provide guidance for educators seeking to create engaging, widely utilized content.

Methods

On 9/4/20, the top 150 podcasts in the U.S under the subcategory "Medicine" were pulled from the publicly available website, Chartable. Five coders collected data and analyzed podcast content. Inter-rater reliability was scored via kappa-fleiss score using 20% of the dataset and suggested excellent agreement (>0.70) across all variables of interest, including content type, associated organization, host's background, format, intended audience, specialty, upload frequency, and episode length. Summary stats were calculated using R software.

Results

78 (52.3%) were founded in 2018 or later. 91 (61.1%) were independent; 11 (7.4%), 11 (7.4%), 10 (6.7%), and 18 (12.1%) were associated with medical journals, hospital systems/universities, medical societies, or test-prep companies, respectively. 94 (63.1%) had only 1 regular host; 89 (59.7%) had a host with an MD or DO. 21 (14.1%) were in a monologue format, 70 (47.0%) were primarily discussion based. 32 (21.5%) and 67 (45.0%) focused on general medicine vs. a specialized medical topic. 108 (72.5%) were intended for HCP's, with 36 (33.3%) being tailored to students/residents, and 49 (45.4%) being primarily for physicians. The most common specialties represented were IM/Primary Care (22, 20.4%), Emergency, Anesthesia, Critical Care (28, 25.9%), and Pediatrics (9, 8.3%). 140 (94.0%) were uploaded either weekly or biweekly. 73 (49%) had an average length of episodes between 20-40 minutes.

TABLE

	N	%		N	%
TOTAL	149	-	**Specialty**		
Industry			Internal Medicine or Primary Care	22	20.4%
Independent/Individuals	91	61.1%	Emergency, Anesthesia, Critical Care	28	25.9%
Medical Journal	11	7.4%	Nursing Specific Topics	12	11.1%
Hospital System/University	11	7.4%	Pediatrics	9	8.3%
Medical Society	10	6.7%	Neurology/Psychiatry	7	6.5%
For-Profit (Test Prep)	18	12.1%	Cardiology	5	4.6%
For-Profit (Other)	8	5.4%	Ob/Gyn	3	2.8%
Any Host Have Medical Degree?			Heme/Onc	3	2.8%
Any	139	93.3%	Surgery	2	1.9%
MD/DO	89	64.0%	Gastroenterology	1	0.9%
PhD	6	4.3%	Dermatology	1	0.9%
RN	24	17.3%	Infectious Disease	1	0.9%
PA or NP	6	4.3%	Other	14	13.0%
PharmD	4	2.9%	**Upload Frequency**		
Other	10	7.2%	> 1x per week	7	4.7%
No Medical Degree	10	6.7%	1x per week	57	38.3%
Format			1-2x per month	83	55.7%
Primarily Discussion	70	47.0%	< 1 per month	2	1.3%
Primarily Interview	15	10.1%	**Average Length**		
Primarily Monologuing	21	14.1%	0-10 minutes	22	14.8%
Blend of Formats	43	28.9%	20-40 minutes	73	49.0%
Intended Audience			40-60 minutes	42	28.2%
Healthcare Professionals	108	72.5%	60+ minutes	12	8.1%
Any HCP	31	28.7%			
Physician Focused	49	45.4%			
RN Focused	21	19.4%			
Other	7	6.5%			
Level of Training (if HCP)					
Any	39	36.1%			
Primarily Attending/Professional	33	30.6%			
Primarily Student/Resident	36	33.3%			

CONCLUSIONS

A majority of top medical podcasts are young, independently created, and intended for an HCP audience. There remains a large opportunity for journals and hospitals/universities to be more involved in podcast creation. Top podcasts were largely driven by 1 or 2 regular hosts, discussion-based in format, uploaded weekly or biweekly, and were between 20-40 minutes.

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