Academic genealogy

“Academic genealogy” refers to the linking of scientists and scholars based on their dissertation supervisors.

An academic genealogy describes mentoring relationships in an academic discipline. In a study, Ziechmann et al. outlined an academic genealogy of neurosurgery department chairs in the United States beginning with the founding members of the field.

The biographic information provided by The Society of Neurological Surgeons provided the basis for the genealogy. They also performed a literature review with PubMed using the term neurosurgery department history. The data was manually uploaded to an online database called Academic Tree. Within this platform, mentor and trainee relationships were indicated to produce an academic genealogy.

The search yielded a total of 377 chairs and 368 mentoring relationships across 98 neurosurgery departments. The largest family tree in our academic genealogy was that of Harvey Cushing, with 177 department chairs. Harvey Cushing was also the individual who trained the most number of department chairs (22). The institution that trained the most department chairs was Brigham and Women's Hospital (26). Only 23.6% of department chairs completed residency training at the same institution where they became chair.

The academic genealogy in this study allows for any neurosurgeon trained in the United States to put his or her training into historical context. It also provides a reference for bibliographic research to quantitatively describe the influence of individuals and institutions on the field [1)].

1)
Ziechmann R, Hoffman H, Chin LS. Academic Genealogy of Neurosurgery via Department Chair. World Neurosurg. 2019 Jan;121:e113-e118. doi: 10.1016/j.wneu.2018.09.023. Epub 2018 Sep 12. PubMed PMID: 30218804.