

What we learned about medical specialty choice in 2018

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In terms of shaping a medical student's future in medicine, few decisions are bigger than specialty choice.

Students should be armed with information when making that choice. It should come as no surprise that many of our most popular news stories in 2018 dealt with the subject.

The AMA provides a guide for medical students on choosing a medical specialty that presents a clear, approachable overview of specialties and subspecialties and can assist you in choosing a career path.

From burnout to payouts, here's a look at what we learned about medical specialty choice this year.

How you can get started. There are many key considerations in choosing a medical specialty to pursue. While the most obvious one might be compensation, a physician's day-to-day existence is shaped by factors that extend well beyond finances.

Knowing how you want to interact with patients and what types of patients are a few of the factors one might want to consider. In terms of getting started, check out four questions that might help you pare down your options.

Which specialties make the most. The highest-paying medical specialties are generally procedure-based. According to an online survey of more than 20,000 physicians across 29 specialties, the highest-paying medical specialties are:

- Plastic surgery—\$501,000 per year.
- Orthopedics—\$497,000.
- Cardiology—\$408,000.
- Radiology—\$401,000.
- Dermatology—\$392,000.

The lowest-paying specialties were in the primary care fields, with internal medicine (\$230,00), family

medicine (\$219,000) and pediatrics (\$212,000) being listed among the bottom five specialties in annual compensation.

The most popular subspecialties. According to data reported by the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) Specialties Matching Service (SMS), subspecialties within internal medicine saw the biggest volume of applicants.

These positions were most popular:

- Cardiovascular disease—1,261 applicants for 894 positions.
- Pulmonary disease and critical care medicine—789 applicants for 568 positions.
- Hematology and oncology—788 applicants for 553 positions.

Which specialties offer the best work-life balance. More than 15,000 physicians from 29 specialties responded to a recent survey about burnout and depression. Overall, 42 percent of respondents were burned out—down from 51 percent last year—and 15 percent admitted to experiencing either clinical or colloquial forms of depression.

Physicians in these medical specialties reported the lowest rates of burnout:

- Plastic surgery—23 percent.
- Dermatology—32 percent.
- Pathology—32 percent.
- Ophthalmology—33 percent.
- Orthopedics—34 percent.

Which specialties are more popular with men, or with women. On the whole, women account for 45.6 percent of active residents training in the U.S. That number is a slight dip from data collected in 2015, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges' 2017 *Report on Residents*.

Women make up a larger percentage of residents in:

- Obstetrics and gynecology—82.7 percent.
- Pediatrics—73 percent.
- Allergy and immunology—70.4 percent.
- Medical genetics—67.1 percent.
- Dermatology—64.4 percent.

Men make up a larger percentage of the residents in:

- Orthopedic surgery—85.1 percent.
- Neurological surgery—82.5 percent.
- Thoracic surgery—73.8 percent.

- | Radiology—73.8 percent.
- | Vascular surgery—67 percent.
- | Otolaryngology—65.2 percent.
- | Plastic surgery—62 percent.