

Job seeking? 7 facets to watch on young physician compensation

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Brendan Murphy

Senior News Writer

Young physicians preparing to transition from residency and fellowship may have a number of questions about their futures in medicine. Those concerns, as highlighted by an AMA Insurance Agency Inc. survey of U.S. medical residents released, extend to finances.

The AMA offers a wide array of financial tools and resources to help young physicians transition to practice. Discover how the AMA can help you refinance medical student loans or evaluate a prospective employer. The AMA “Making the Rounds” podcast features a six-part series of advice on physician contracting (iTunes).

Having a better idea of potential future earnings can give young physicians a better understanding of what to expect in their professional and personal lives. Here’s a look at some facts and figures related to young physician compensation that are worth keeping in mind.

Which young physicians earn the most

A Medscape survey of more than 5,400 young physicians indicates that the top earning specialties for doctors under 40 are:

- Plastic surgery—\$519,000 annually.
- Orthopedics—\$424,000.
- Gastroenterology—\$354,000.
- Otolaryngology—\$342,000.

The data, compiled by Medscape, lists the five lowest paying specialty fields among physicians under 40. Those are:

- Pathology—\$195,000 annually.

- Endocrinology—\$189,000.
- Pediatrics—\$187,000.
- Infectious diseases—\$186,000.
- Public health and preventive medicine—\$132,000.

Most young physicians are still paying their loans. With 80 percent of medical residents reporting student-loan debt of \$100,000 or more, it makes sense that physicians under 40 are more bogged down by educational expenses.

According to the survey, 60 percent of physicians under 40 were paying off student loans, compared with 18 percent of physicians 40 or older. Meanwhile, 27 percent of younger physicians were paying off their significant other's educational loans, three times the 9 percent of older physicians in the same boat.

Earning and experience align closely. Specialists 40 or older made an average of \$353,000 per year, compared with \$281,000 for physicians in those fields under 40. The difference in primary care was less stark, with physicians 40 or older earning an average of \$236,000 annually, compared with \$204,000 for doctors under 40.

Specialty appears to be less of a factor in student-loan debt. When looking at the specialties in which physicians are paying off their debt, the results were a mixed bag of specialists and primary care physicians. Among respondents, the top five specialties in which physicians under 40 were still paying off their loans are:

- Psychiatry—87 percent.
- Urology—73 percent.
- Family medicine—73 percent.
- Pulmonary medicine—72 percent.
- Pediatrics—71 percent.

The responses do not seem to correspond directly with specialty-specific compensation figures. For instance, urology is among the top 10 paying medical specialties for physicians younger than 40, with an average compensation of \$327,000, yet it ranks second among physicians under 40 still paying their medical loans.

The gender wage gap does not increase with age. The wage gap between male and female physicians is lowest among the youngest and oldest survey respondents. Male physicians younger than 34 make 25 percent more than their female counterparts, and that number rises to 29 percent for respondents between 55 and 69 years old.

The disparities are higher for midcareer physicians, with men 35–44 making 38 percent more than women, while men between 45–54 earning 42 percent more than their female colleagues.

Young physicians usually work for somebody else. Only 12 percent of survey respondents younger than 40 indicated they are self-employed. That response aligns with recent trends and offers some explanation for the income gap between younger and older physicians.

As age rises, reaching for next rung on career ladder falls. Nearly 60 percent of physicians under 40 are aiming for a promotion, compared with just 30 percent of physicians 40 or older. There is little variation in the desire for promotion by gender among the young physician respondents, with 60 percent of male physicians and 58 percent of female physicians indicating they are seeking to get promoted.