

Why commute time should be a factor in your residency house hunt

APR 13, 2021

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After long shifts on the wards, most residents seek to limit the time they are spending getting to and from work. Your commute time adds up to hidden work hours—ones for which you aren't on the clock but aren't able to fully relax or recharge.

Christopher Sampson, MD, is an associate professor of emergency medicine at the University of Missouri School of Medicine. He conducted a survey of nearly 600 emergency medicine residents that looked at how long they commute and how they get from work to home.

“There was an association between people—when they had longer commute time—that it affected well-being, especially people who had commute times greater than an hour,” Dr. Sampson said. That makes sense, he said. After a draining emergency medicine shift, a long commute home, hopefully a healthy dinner and the blissful reprieve of sleep, “you’ve really limited the amount of time you’ve had to decompress after working,” he noted.

If you are relocating for residency, keep these things in mind.

How long does it take?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average national commute time is about half an hour. Dr. Sampson’s survey reflected similar trends among emergency medicine residents.

The survey found that 34% of respondents had a commute time of less than 15 minutes and 36% had commutes between 16 and 30 minutes. On the longer side, 11% of residents had commutes of 46–60 minutes and 2% logged commute times of 61–75 minutes. As highlighted by Dr. Sampson above, when asked what impact their commute time had on well-being, 75% of those with commute times greater than an hour said it was detrimental.

Most respondents indicated they were doing their residency training at hospitals in urban settings. The respondents overwhelmingly drove to work, with 73% of residents listing “car” as their main method of commuting. Other methods of commuting were:

- | Bicycle—11%.
- | Walk—7%.
- | Train—7%.
- | Bus—1%.

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Home choice and commuting time

For residents looking to find the ideal living arrangement, commuting time is just one factor of significance, but it certainly can affect professional satisfaction. Dr. Sampson spoke of a colleague who moved from Atlanta to a small Midwestern city largely because he was tired of the commute times in that notoriously gridlocked Southern metropolis.

“The ideal factors in picking where you live are finding somewhere that’s fairly close, probably under 30 minutes driving, has resources you want for a home or an apartment, and is also safe,” Dr. Sampson said. “In most urban and suburban places, you are going to have a lot of choices for living that are under 30 minutes” from work.

For many residents, other life factors will likely outweigh commute time in deciding where you live. If you have children, for instance, you may want to live in an area that provides the schooling options you prefer. Some of it is also simply going to be a matter of personal preference.

“When I was an intern, I lived within walking distance of my residency program,” he said. “I liked that it was close and I could get to work quickly. I had some co-residents who didn’t want to see the sight of the hospital or the academic center and wanted to live further away.”