Annual survey shows graduating residents have high debt load, high career satisfaction
by from AAP Research

The Academy will conduct its 25th Annual Survey of Graduating Residents this year to understand the training experiences and career interests of young pediatricians.

Since 1997, the Academy has surveyed a nationally representative sample of residents graduating from U.S. pediatric programs to gather data on demographics and residency training, career choice and job search experiences.

Several key trends have emerged since 1997:

- More graduates today are female: 61% in 1997 vs. 72% in 2020.
- The majority are married/partnered: 71% vs. 67%. In both years, 34% of these residents had spouses/partners who also were physicians.
- Fewer have children: 40% vs. 24%.
- Fewer say their career goal is primary care practice, 66% vs. 35% (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of pediatric residents with a primary care practice career goal, 1997-2020

Sources: AAP Annual Survey of Graduating Residents, 1997-2020; n=11,240
Graduating pediatricians report very high satisfaction with their chosen careers. Since 2003, about 95% have reported they would choose a pediatric residency again. Nearly all have a job or position as they leave residency (94% in 1997 and 98% in 2020), and few report considerable difficulty in their search (10% in 2003 and 4% in 2020).

A concerning trend is the increased educational debt young pediatricians face. Among residents with any educational debt, the average debt increased from $132,500 in 1997 to $264,000 in 2020 (after adjusting for inflation). Half of all residents in 2020 reported $200,000 or more in debt (see figure 2). Over this time, the starting salary of residents entering full-time primary care practice increased from $154,000 in 2003 to $176,000 in 2020 (after adjusting for inflation).

Figure 2. Percentage of pediatric residents graduating with $200,000 or more in educational debt,* 1997-2020

*Educational debt has been adjusted for inflation and includes spouse/partner debt, if applicable. About one-quarter of residents each year report no debt and are included in the <$200,000 group.

Source: AAP Annual Survey of Graduating Residents, 1997-2020; n=11,249
"It is wonderful to see that the majority of pediatricians are happy with their chosen career path and were able to find meaningful employment straight out of residency. Academy leadership values the information collected from graduates and are grateful to residents who respond to the survey," said Maya Moody, D.O., FAAP, chair of the AAP Section on Early Career Physicians Executive Committee. "The information we learn from graduates, including an increased interest in subspecialty training and the burden of medical education debt, are shaping our future programs and services for AAP members."

The Annual Survey of Graduating Residents is conducted each year from May to August. Surveys are mailed and emailed to a random sample of 1,000 graduating pediatric residents. Response rates have ranged from 78% in 1997 to 48% in 2020.

Resources

- Residents and fellowship trainees in financial need are encouraged to apply for an AAP Hardship Scholarship. Applications are due April 15
- TAAP Insurance Program resources on financial wellness
- AAP Insurance Program resources on student loan refinancing
- For more information on the Annual Survey of Graduating Residents, visit http://www.aap.org/grs or contact Mary Pat Frintner at 630-626-6664 or mfrintner@aap.org.
- Additional Research Update columns