Lifetime Earning Potential of Pediatric and Adult Physicians: Time to Even the Playing Field
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In April of this year, Pediatrics published an article (10.1542/peds.2020-027771) by Drs. Eva Catenaccio (Johns Hopkins), Jonathan Rochlin (Maimonides Medical Center), and Harold Simon (Emory) noting differences in the lifetime earning potential of pediatric subspecialists compared to general pediatrics. In this analysis, most subspecialists had a lower lifetime earning potential. This study, which suggested ways to lower the difference, generated quite a bit of attention. However, it only looked within the “house of pediatrics” and not at other houses of adult medical specialties in comparison to ours. In a report that we are early releasing this month (10.1542/peds.2021-051194), the same three authors now describe the lifetime earning potential of pediatric and adult physicians who are in general and subspecialty practice.

The authors used compensation and debt data from national physician surveys for 2019-2020 to model lifetime earning potential for adult vs pediatric physicians. In every area, general or subspecialty, the authors’ model indicated that adult physicians would earn on average 25% more than any of their pediatric counterparts. Even after adjusting for the longer years of subspecialty training for some pediatric vs. adult subspecialties, the adult physicians would still earn 19% more than pediatricians, suggesting that length of training is not the leading cause for these differences.

The authors provide lots of detail if you want to compare what you do to your adult counterparts. The authors also describe the short- and long-term ramifications of these disparities in salaries affect workforce and potentially even patient access to care. They offer suggestions for how to narrow that earnings gap. Making those suggestions a reality will take advocacy to change in how salaries are set for pediatricians.

Do you feel that the lower lifetime earning potential will affect the future pipeline of pediatricians or will our workforce stay strong because of the inherent commitment we have to improve the health and wellbeing of all children regardless of what we are paid? We welcome your comments and action steps generated by this newest study on lifetime earnings of pediatric and adult generalists and specialists by these three authors via this blog site, our website, or our social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram).