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Chairs of United States Academic Ophthalmology Departments: A Descriptive Analysis and Trends

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Abstract

Purpose: To characterize and analyze the profile of United States (US) academic ophthalmology department chairs.

Design: Cross-sectional study.

Setting: Web search of publicly-accessible sources.

Study population: 111 US ophthalmology chairs.

Main Outcome Measures: Demographic and academic data.

Results: Of the 111 chairs reviewed, 90% are males. Mean age of chairs is 59 years, and mean age at time of appointment is 47 years. Ninety-two percent of chairs graduated from an American medical school. Twenty-eight percent of chairs also have additional graduate degrees: 8% a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree, 15% a Master's degree, and 5% both. Ninety-five percent of chairs completed a clinical fellowship most frequently in cornea (25%), vitreoretinal surgery (23%) and glaucoma (21%). The three programs that trained the largest number of chairs are: Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, Wilmer Eye Institute, and Bascom Palmer Eye Institute. Thirty-two percent of chairs were previously-trained in the program they currently head, more commonly as a resident (28%) than as a fellow (5%). The estimated mean number of publications per chair is 108 (range, 0 – 850) and the mean h-index is 24. Twenty-seven programs exchanged chairs from 2014-2017. The characteristics of appointed chairs are no different than those of recently-retired chairs.

Conclusions: Ophthalmology chairs remain predominately male, most often specializing in cornea, vitreoretinal surgery or glaucoma. Most chairs tend to be prolific authors, whose careers have placed an emphasis on research; however, a lack of demonstrated research experience does not preclude chairmanship in certain US programs.

Keywords: Leadership; Ophthalmology chair; Education

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