

International Emergency Medicine



CAREER PATHS AND PRACTICE PATTERNS OF GLOBAL EMERGENCY MEDICINE PHYSICIANS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL SURVEY

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Abstract—Background: Increasing numbers of emergency medicine (EM) residents and fellows are completing additional training with the intention of pursuing careers in global emergency medicine (GEM). At the same time, many academic emergency departments (EDs) are investing in the development of GEM divisions and global/international EM fellowship programs. However, the path for a successful career in this subspecialty has still not been defined. **Objective:** Our aim was to survey emergency physicians engaged in GEM in order to characterize their practice patterns and career paths, and to identify barriers to a successful career. **Methods:** An online survey assessing demographics, timing and content of work, financing and barriers, and academic productivity was deployed to emergency physicians. Descriptive statistics were analyzed using STATA software. **Results:** A total of 116 attending emergency physicians responded. Female respondents tended to be younger (51% vs. 27%; $p = 0.012$). Younger respondents were more likely to have completed advanced GEM training (20% vs. 7%; $p = 0.037$). Most (73%) respondents spent fewer than 3 months annually abroad. Self funding was the most common (47%) source of funding, while only 16% reported receiving grant support. Lack of time and

funding were the most commonly encountered barriers to a career in GEM (64% and 55%, respectively). **Conclusions:** Our survey provides an understanding of the amount of time that emergency physicians in GEM spend abroad and the types of activities in which they are currently engaged, as well as the barriers that need to be overcome in order to achieve fulfilling careers in this field. © 2014 Elsevier Inc.

Keywords—global emergency medicine; international emergency medicine; career; academic; funding; grant; publication

INTRODUCTION

Global emergency medicine (GEM), a subspecialty of emergency medicine (EM), has grown rapidly during the past decade, as interest and opportunities in the field continue to expand at the undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate medical education levels. At the undergraduate medical education level, the percent of graduating United States (US) medical students who have completed an international rotation (IR) has grown from 5.9% in 1978 to 22.3% in 2004 (1). At the graduate medical education level, more and more EM residents are participating in elective IRs. Currently, 91% of EM training

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programs offer IRs, and 22% of EM residents complete an IR during their residency (2). At the postgraduate medical level, the number of GEM and international emergency medicine (IEM) fellowships programs is also increasing. Since the first program began in 1995, the number has steadily risen to the current number of 34 active GEM/IEM fellowship programs (3).

This growth of training opportunities has led to an increased number of junior physicians pursuing careers in GEM; however, the path for a successful career in this subspecialty has still not been defined. Other research teams have published information from surveys of health care providers practicing internationally (4). This article presents the results of a survey conducted of academic and community emergency physicians engaged in GEM. Through this survey, emergency physicians pursuing careers in GEM are better characterized, their career paths are more clearly delineated, and barriers are identified.

METHODS

Survey Design

An online survey was developed by the authors with the goal of better describing the career paths and characteristics of emergency physicians engaged in GEM practice. The survey was designed to include four basic types of questions: 1) demographics, 2) timing and content of work, 3) financing and barriers, and 4) academic productivity. The survey was initially piloted on 15 physician leaders in GEM and revised based on their feedback. The survey was then converted into an electronic format utilizing the Survey Monkey® platform. This research was deemed exempt by the University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board.

Selection of Participants

In May 2012, a request to participate in the online survey was sent by electronic mail to all emergency physician members of the Society for Academic Emergency Medicine (SAEM), the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) International Section, and the American Academy of Emergency Medicine (AAEM) International Section. Regardless of their membership status, survey participants were instructed to complete the survey only if they self identified as pursuing careers in GEM. Consent was obtained from all participants at the beginning of the survey. Given that the focus of this study was to better characterize the career paths of practicing emergency physicians currently engaged in GEM work, we excluded responses from medical students and residents. Responses from GEM/IEM fellows were included.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the responses of practicing GEM physicians to each of our survey questions. A further subanalysis of responses categorized by sex and age category was also performed. Difference in proportions was calculated and analyzed for statistical significance ($\alpha = 0.05$). Data were analyzed using STATA 11.2 Software (College Station, TX).

RESULTS

A total of 156 responses were received, 116 of which were from practicing attending emergency physicians, including GEM/IEM fellows. The remaining 40 responses from resident physicians and medical students were excluded from analysis as described here.

Age and Sex

More than two thirds of the respondents 81 of 116 (70%) were male. The vast majority 101 of 116 (87%) of respondents were between 30 and 59 years of age. As a group, female respondents were younger, with 51% being younger than 40 years old compared with 27% of male respondents ($p = 0.012$). Current academic rank was split approximately evenly between assistant professor, associate professor, and professor.

Formal Training or Advanced Degree

More than half (53%) of the respondents had not pursued any formal training or advanced degree in GEM or public health (Figure 1). Among those who had received further training, the most common response was a short course in global health (23%), followed by the completion of a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree (20%). Only 11% of respondents had completed a GEM/IEM fellowship program. Younger respondents were more likely to have completed a GEM/IEM fellowship program (20% vs. 7%; $p = 0.037$) or an MPH (35% vs. 12%; $p = 0.003$). Complete demographic information of the EM attending physician respondents is displayed in Table 1. Participants may have completed more than one type of additional training. Selected survey responses are shown in Table 2.

Time Spent Abroad

The majority of respondents overall (73%) reported spending < 3 months annually abroad as part of their GEM work (Figure 2). Some respondents (15%) reported not spending any time abroad doing GEM work in the past 5 years. A minority of respondents (12%) reported

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