

Practice Expectations Compared to Reality for Women in Urology: A National Survey

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Abstract

Introduction: We determined the patient gender distribution for practicing male and female urologists in the U.S. compared to current resident expectations.

Methods: Two mirrored surveys were distributed to AUA members practicing in the U.S. Questions were asked regarding years in training and practice, subspecialty, gender representation of patients and job satisfaction. Answer choices were based on a 5-point balanced Likert scale.

Results: Overall there were 894 respondents, including 704 practicing urologists and 190 urology residents, of whom women accounted for 14%. This figure reflects current AUA demographic data. Only 15.2% of female residents expected that once in practice more than 60% of their patients would be women compared to 45.5% of practicing female physicians who indicated that more than 60% of their patients are women. When stratified by fellowship training the 38.5% of female physicians who were trained in a specialty other than female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery and pediatrics still most commonly saw more than 60% female patients compared to 0.8% of male physicians. Overall satisfaction with the gender balance of patients was 76.0% for female physicians and 70.9% for male physicians.

Conclusions: Female urologists report seeing greater numbers of female patients than their male counterparts and specialty training only modestly alters this gap. Current female residents may underestimate the number of women they will eventually see in practice based on current trends in our survey. However, overall satisfaction with the gender balance of patients seen is high.

Key Words: sex distribution; time factors; patient care; specialties; surgical

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AUA = American
Urological Association

FPMRS = female pelvic
medicine and reconstructive
surgery

Women are entering urology residencies at an increasing rate with an estimated 12% of residency positions held by women in 2011 compared to 4.2% in 1995.^{1,2} Diversity of

procedures and practice are the most cited reasons women choose urology as a specialty.³ However, there is a sentiment that women are pigeonholed into taking care of female urology issues, which are traditionally more time-consuming and provide fewer surgical opportunities.⁴ Thus, the current practice for female physicians in urology may not be aligned with resident expectations.

We hypothesized that the expectations of female urology residents for their patient gender breakdown are not in line

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with the current practice environment for women in urology. We explored whether there is in fact a difference between the patient populations of practicing male and female urologists, how this compares to resident expectations and whether subspecialty training altered this balance. The overall goal of the study is to help female urology residents frame their expectations with the current practice environment and make informed career choices.

Materials and Methods

The study was submitted to the institutional review board and was determined to be exempt. Before distribution a focus group of urology residents and attending physicians tested the preliminary survey. A survey was distributed to AUA members practicing in the U.S. who were contacted via their regional section with a link to the survey. Most survey items used a 5-point Likert scale which included the response options of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree. The survey also included multiple demographic questions on gender, training, years in practice, and practice type and size. The survey was administered in an electronic form using a secure third-party website (www.surveymonkey.com). Consent to participate in research was demonstrated by following the link to the electronic survey, reading the first question containing the consent information and clicking on accept or decline. If decline was selected the survey ended and if accept was selected the survey began.

Results

Demographics

Overall 704 practicing urologists and 190 urology residents completed the survey, including 126 women and 768 men. Of the practicing urologists 79 (11.2%) were female compared to 47 (32.8%) in the resident group. Although the detailed gender makeup of those contacted is not known, the overall makeup of 14% female respondents reflects the most recent AUA membership data showing that approximately 10% of members are female.⁵ Most physicians had a practice size of 4 to 10 urologists (36.4%), with the next most common size being more than 11 urologists in the group (26%). Of the male practicing physicians 57.3% had no female urologists in their group. Of the female physicians 48% were the only practicing female in their group and 31.6% had 1 female partner in their practice. Most respondents practiced in an urban environment or medium size city with no difference between the genders.

The majority of physicians in practice who responded to the survey were more than 20 years in practice (301, 43%). In the practicing physician group 36.3% had completed a fellowship, with women (43%) outnumbering men (34.2%). Of the women who completed fellowship training 26% (9 of 34) pursued pediatrics and 35% (12 of 34) pursued female urology.

Years in Training

When divided into subgroups by gender and years in training, male and female practicing urologists reported similar preferences for treating female patients as well as addressing issues typically considered specifically female urology or part of the FPMRS subspecialty, including urinary incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse. However, there was an overall difference by physician age. Of the practicing urologists who had less than 10 years in practice 34% reported that they did not like or somewhat did not like addressing FPMRS issues compared to 16.0% and 14.2% of urologists who were 10 to 20 years and more than 20 years out of practice, respectively (fig. 1).

Patient Volume

In the resident group 15.2% of female residents indicated that they expected more than 60% of their patients to be women compared to 1.4% of male residents. Approximately two-thirds of male and female residents expected to see 21% to 40% and 41% to 60% of female patients out of their total patient volume, respectively, but reported similar expectations of the percentage of FPMRS issues that they anticipated addressing (fig. 2).

Of practicing female physicians 45.5% indicated that more than 60% of their patients are women compared to 2.1% of male physicians (fig. 2). Interestingly the majority (57.4%) stated that this percentage was equal to their expectations in residency. The majority of male providers in practice (69.5%) reported that less than 40% of their patient population is female, with 70.0% reporting that less than 40% of their female patients present with FPMRS issues. This is in contrast to 72.1% of female physicians reporting that more than 40% of their patients are female and 66.7% noting that these patients present with FPMRS issues 40% of the time.

Subspecialty Training

Subspecialty training categories that participants could select included pediatrics, female urology or FPMRS, oncology, minimally invasive/endourology and reconstruction.

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