

Attitudes Toward Research During Residency: A Survey of Canadian Residents in Obstetrics and Gynecology

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OBJECTIVES: Obstetrics and Gynecology (Ob/Gyn) residency programs in Canada mandate participation in scholarly research activity, yet there remains a lack of literature on trainees' opinions regarding its value, feasibility, and perceived effect on future practice. An understanding of resident attitudes toward research during residency is essential in effectively engaging trainees and fostering a robust research community in the field. We sought to identify factors reported to influence involvement in resident research, including perceived barriers.

DESIGN: Anonymous data were collected via an online survey distributed to all residents enrolled in accredited Ob/Gyn residency programs throughout Canada. The 10-minute, previously piloted questionnaire covered questions related to demographic information, research experience, career goals, current research activities, opinions on research environment, and opinions regarding the effect of research on future practice. Descriptive statistics were used to describe demographics, research background, and current research activities. Categorical variables were compared using the chi-square analysis and continuous variables were compared using the Mann-Whitney rank sum tests.

RESULTS: A total of 175 residents completed the survey; 61% agreed/strongly agreed that they participate in research solely because it is mandated by their program, 22% felt that their training environment did not promote research, 19% disagreed/strongly disagreed that research is a positive experience, while 70% agreed/strongly agreed that they would prefer to complete another educational activity other than a research project. Time constraints owing to residency duties, time constraints owing to personal reasons, and lack of statistical knowledge were reported as barriers to research involvement by 97%, 90%, and 74% of trainees, respectively. Residents with graduate degrees were less

likely to report lack of training on research design as a moderate/extreme barrier (7% vs 32%, $p = 0.007$).

CONCLUSIONS: There exists considerable disparity in enthusiasm for scholarly research activity among Ob/Gyn residents. Curricular development should focus on addressing resident-reported barriers, including the provision of protected time for research and access to statistical support and education, particularly for residents without graduate degrees. (J Surg Ed 72:836-843. © 2015 Association of Program Directors in Surgery. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.)

KEY WORDS: graduate medical education, research, curriculum, medical residency

COMPETENCIES: Practice-Based Learning and Improvement, Professionalism, Medical Knowledge, Systems-Based Practice

INTRODUCTION

Although most specialists in Obstetrics and Gynecology (Ob/Gyn) do not incorporate research into their practice, involvement in this scholarly activity is considered an essential component of Canadian residency specialty training. Indeed, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada mandates "active participation in the development, execution, data analysis, interpretation, and presentation of at least one scholarly research project"¹ for certification in Ob/Gyn. The Association of Academic Professionals in Obstetrics and Gynecology (APOG) has outlined recommended expectations for resident research activity,² pushing programs to develop mandatory research curricula. In defense of this requirement are multiple benefits ascribed to the experience, irrespective of future participation in research, including that it promotes an appreciation for evidence-based medicine, improves overall resident satisfaction with their training program,³ provides the skill set required for critical thinking and lifelong learning,^{4,5} fosters mentorship relationships, and influences career choice.⁴⁻⁶

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Additional benefits for those who wish to pursue an academic practice include the opportunity to lay the groundwork for continued scholarly work^{4,5} and associated future academic success, as measured by enhanced publication rates and awarding of external funding.⁷

However, trainee interest in pursuing research is inconsistent, varying by specialty,⁸⁻¹⁰ career goals,¹⁰ personality traits,¹¹ previous training,^{10,12} and previous research experience.⁸ Studies in other specialties show that many trainees feel that research should not be mandatory and report that they would instead prefer to undertake other academic activities.⁹ Similar attitudes may be prevalent in Ob/Gyn—a field in which up to 80% of residents do not pursue fellowship training.¹³ Compounding this variable interest among trainees are numerous reported obstacles to resident research involvement, including a lack of time,^{3,10,14} a lack of interest among faculty or an overall perceived paucity of mentors,^{3,10,14} and the resultant sense of few opportunities to become involved.¹⁰ Furthermore, program support may not adequately meet the needs of residents in order to succeed in research endeavors. For instance, a survey of Canadian and American Ob/Gyn program directors found that although 95% required residents to complete a research project to graduate, most programs did not provide formal training on clinical research design or biostatistics.¹⁵

The field of Ob/Gyn poses yet another set of distinct obstacles to resident involvement in research. The specialty has a high proportion of women, who have been shown to engage in less research,¹⁴ receive less National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant funding even when correcting for publication experience,¹⁶ and are less likely to advance to full professor status¹⁷ compared with their male counterparts. Moreover, unique ethical considerations for studies involving obstetrical patients¹⁸ as well as patients' desire for privacy when investigating sexual health-related issues¹⁹ may render certain aspects of research projects (e.g., patient recruitment)

more challenging than in other specialties. A more recent survey study on adherence to accreditation-driven guidelines among American Ob/Gyn residency programs reported that although 99% of program directors felt that research was a goal of their program, 17% of residents did not agree that their training environment promoted research.²⁰

Despite being a mandatory component of Canadian residency training, there are limited data on Ob/Gyn resident attitudes toward research activity during residency. Insight into factors underlying their enthusiasm toward research, their assessments of their research environments, and the perceived barriers to their success in this domain are key to implementing effective research curricula in residency training and, in the case of some trainees, optimally nurturing the early stages of future research-oriented careers in the field.

METHODS

An online-based survey was distributed to all Canadian Royal College–accredited Ob/Gyn residency programs (SurveyMonkey, Palo Alto, CA) in June 2014. Perceived research barriers and measures of attitudes toward research were identified based on interviews with residents and staff involved in research curricula, in addition to extensive literature review. Survey questions were developed according to the protocol by Artino et al.²¹ The survey was edited by a committee of 4 staff obstetrician-gynecologists involved in medical education and the research curriculum at the University of Ottawa. Questions were reviewed with the Ottawa Hospital Methods Centre for statistical analysis planning and design. Our pilot study was completed by 21 residents in April 2014, using Ob/Gyn residents registered at the University of Ottawa ($n = 38$) to assess feasibility, response times, and question validity. The final survey questions are shown in [Appendix A](#).

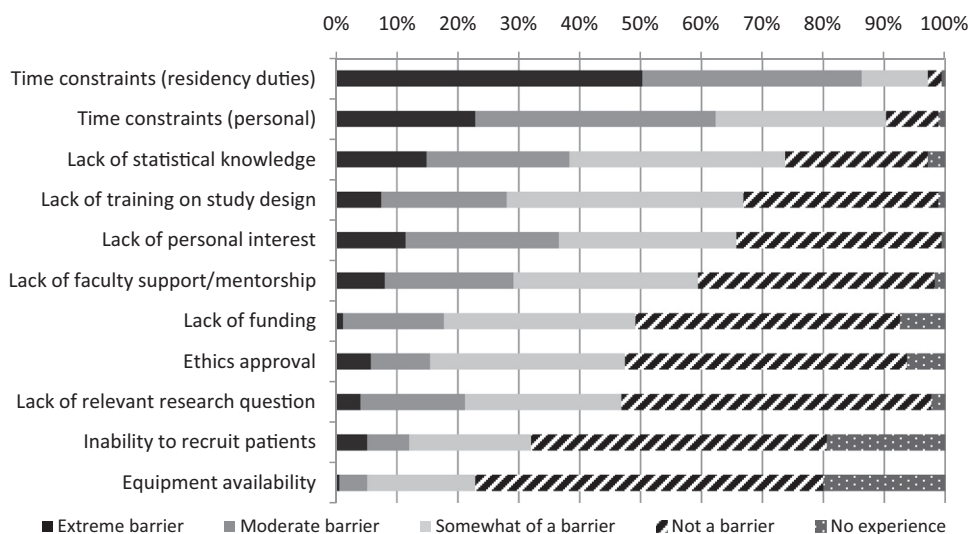


FIGURE. Barriers to research as reported by Canadian Ob/Gyn residents.

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