

# The Perfect Storm Is on the Horizon!

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**PURPOSE:** Provide analysis of data identifying the impending mass turnover of Directors and Coordinators of General Surgery residency programs and the potential effect on successful continuing accreditation including the ACGME Next Accreditation System (NAS) and associated self study.

**METHODS:** The Association of Residency Coordinators in Surgery, Executive Committee (ARCS EC) anonymously surveyed 254 general surgery Program Coordinators in September/October 2016. This represents 60% of all the members within the Association of Residency Coordinators in Surgery. Survey was accomplished using SurveyMonkey. Questions included demographics and experience of the Director and Coordinator, accreditation status, significant job stressors, and potential retirements or position changes planned or possible.

**RESULTS:** 153 (60%) respondents completed the survey. Data from the survey indicates that 67% of Program Directors have been in their position less than six (6) years. 34% of Program Coordinators have been in their position less than five (5) years. 56% of coordinators have been on the job less than ten (10) years. Coordinators in 76% of programs reported significant levels of burnout. 59% have considered resigning from their position in the past year. Participants consistently reported increasing responsibilities and expectations combined with declining or inadequate levels of support as sources of job stress. Other contributors to Coordinator burnout were identified as related to the additional ACGME accreditation requirements and salaries not commensurate with workload.

**CONCLUSION:** This survey represents a sentinel preliminary look at the possible impending manning crisis in general surgery residency program leadership. A Program Director is supported by a Program Coordinators who are burned out and considering a job change. The resultant potential turnover in personnel and loss of collective program knowledge may have devastating ramifications to program accreditation. Subsequent survey of the workforce will evaluate proposed solutions and interventions to prevent this outcome and secure the future success of general surgery programs. (J Surg Ed ■■■■-■■■. © 2017 Association of Program Directors in Surgery. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.)

**KEY WORDS:** residency coordinator, wellness, burnout, administrator

**COMPETENCIES:** Practice-Based Learning and Improvement, Professionalism, System-Based Practice, Interpersonal and Communication Skills

## INTRODUCTION

The Association of Residency Coordinators in Surgery was founded 30 years ago in an effort to support the expanding role of General Surgery Residency Coordinators. Over time, the role of residency coordinator has evolved from one which primarily consisted of typing, filing, and data entry, to that of an administrator whose responsibilities include planning, organizing, and leading. Today, General Surgery Program Coordinators work directly with program directors, playing an active role in the management and day-to-day operations of Residency Programs. The Executive Committee of the Association of Residency Coordinators in Surgery (ARCS EC) conducted a research project in an

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effort to analyze how the ARCS EC could best support its membership. The original aim of the survey was to identify core administrative duties performed by General Surgery Program Coordinators across all demographics; measure the possible effect of increasing responsibilities, as well as length of service and job satisfaction, specific needs, and major concerns of surgery coordinators. Analysis of the data collected identified an impending mass turnover of program directors and program coordinators of general surgery residency programs, which has the potential to affect successful continuing accreditation of programs.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

In 2016, the ARCS EC conducted a 19 question survey using SurveyMonkey. Questions included demographics (Table 1) and experience of the program directors and residency coordinators, accreditation status, significant job stressors, job duties, and potential retirement or position changes planned in the future. The survey was sent to 254 General Surgery Program Coordinators throughout the United States. Participants of the study were members of the ARCS as identified by the membership database provided by the Association of Program Directors in Surgery.

**TABLE 1.** Demographics of Study Participants

Participants, N (%)	153 (60)
Region of USA (%)	
Midwest	20.9
Northeast	30.7
Southern	30.1
Western	18.3
Program size (%)	
< 15 residents	13.1
15-30 residents	34.0
30+ residents	52.9
Program type (%)	
University program	56.9
Community based	42.5
University-affiliated military	0.7

## RESULTS

As illustrated in Table 2, the number of ARCS members that participated in the survey was 153 (60%). Data from the survey indicated that 68% of the program directors have been in their position less than 6 years, 34% of residency coordinators have been in their position less than 5 years, 56% of residency coordinators have been on the job less than 10 years, and 44% of residency coordinators have been on the job for more than 10 years.

A cross reference of the ARCS membership list and attendance roster at the 2016 New Coordinators Workshop suggests that approximately one-third of coordinators are new, with less than 3 years of experience.

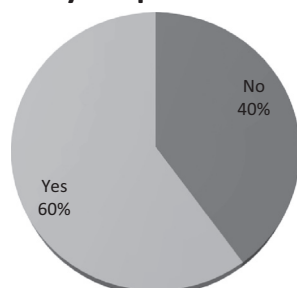
Residency coordinators in 76% of programs reported significant levels of burnout, and 60% reported they have considered resigning from their position in the past year (Fig). Participants consistently reported increasing responsibilities and expectations combined with declining or inadequate levels of support as sources of job stress. Table 3 provides a list of job responsibilities reported by survey participants.

Furthermore, 55% of participants reported that the Offices of Academic Affairs or Graduate Medical Education (GME) did not provide, or sometimes provided, help with best practices or professional development. Other

**TABLE 2.** Study Populations Broken Down by Time in Positions

Participants, N (%)	153 (60)
Coordinator, years in position (%)	
< 1 y	3.3
1-3 y	17.3
3-5 y	13.3
5-10 y	22.0
10+ y	44.0
Program directors, years in position (%)	
< 1 y	13.3
1-3 ys	32.5
4-6 y	21.9
7-9 y	11.3
10+ y	21.2

In the past year, have you considered resigning from your position?



Participants, N	153
<b>Why? (%)</b>	
Volume of Work	35.3
Not enough pay	33.3
Not enough administration help	31.4
Changes in career plans	5.9

**FIGURE.** Reasons for considering resignation as reported by Survey Participants over the last year.

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