

Practice Settings and Sources of Patient-Care Income of Psychiatrists in Early, Mid, and Late Career

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In May 1996 the office of research of the American Psychiatric Association, in collaboration with the APA Practice Research Network, conducted the National Survey of Psychiatric Practice, a descriptive study designed to provide representative national data on important issues in psychiatry (1). A 23-item questionnaire was mailed to 1,481 psychiatrists randomly selected from a sample of 28,076 APA members considered active in psychiatry. A total of 1,076 surveys were returned; 970 were considered valid for analysis, for a response rate of 71 percent.

This column examines differences in the work settings and income sources of psychiatrists in three age cohorts: 39 years and younger (N=219), 40 to 54 years (N=393), and 55 years and older (N=358). These age cohorts were a proxy for early, mid, and late stages in

a psychiatrist's professional career.

Psychiatrists in all three groups reported treating the majority of their patients in outpatient settings, but early-career psychiatrists treated the greatest percentage of inpatients (25 percent).

Figure 1 shows the time psychiatrists spent on patient care in various work settings. Late- and mid-career psychiatrists spent a greater percentage of time in solo office practice, while early-career psychiatrists spent a greater percentage of time in clinics and outpatient facilities and in general hospitals.

Figure 2 shows sources of patient-care income. Early-career psychiatrists received more than half their income from salary. Fee-for-service payments were the largest source of income for mid- and late-career psychiatrists. Late-career psychiatrists received a greater percentage of income from undiscounted fee-for-service payments compared with the other two groups.

For all three groups, the greatest percentage of patients used private commercial insurance as their main source of payment, but the percentage was

highest (40 percent) for mid-career psychiatrists. Early-career psychiatrists had the greatest proportion of patients for whom Medicaid was the main source of payment (18 percent), while late-career psychiatrists treated a greater proportion of self-paid patients (20 percent).

Some of the observed variations in practice patterns may be associated with changes in the health care environment. However, other factors may be at work, including differences in training backgrounds and in the attractiveness of certain career paths during different decades, as well as the presumed ability of older psychiatrists to obtain more desirable positions. ♦

Acknowledgment

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Reference

1. Zarin DZ, Pincus HA, West JW, et al: Practice-based research in psychiatry: American Journal of Psychiatry 154:1199-1208, 1997

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Figure 1

Percentage of time psychiatrists spent on patient care in various settings, by psychiatrists' age group

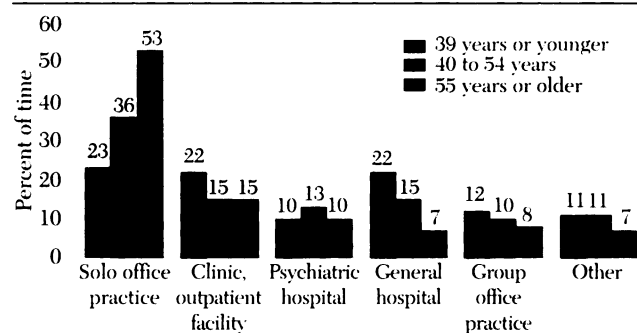


Figure 2

Percentage of income psychiatrists received for patient care from various sources, by psychiatrists' age group

