

orthopaedic surgery



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ORTHOPAEDIC SURGERY

Background

Orthopaedics is the medical specialty devoted to the diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and prevention of injuries and diseases of your musculoskeletal system. This complex system includes your bones, joints, ligaments, tendons, muscles, and nerves. These are tended to by systems of medical, surgical and physical means.

Orthopaedic surgeons are concerned with primary and secondary muscular problems, congenital deformities, trauma, infections, tumors and metabolic disturbances of the musculoskeletal system. Their practice may be broad or limited to an area of special interest such as hand surgery or sports medicine.

Orthopaedic surgeons treat patients of all ages, mostly on a short-term basis. Since many of their patients have been involved in accidents, orthopaedic surgeons also assess disability in legal actions. The field has undergone notable improvements in techniques and equipment such as microsurgery and joint replacements.

The orthopaedic surgeon manages special problems, diagnosis the injury or disorder and sets the treatment plan utilizing medicine, exercise, or physical therapy.

Profile

Of the 38 participants in the survey, 90 percent are certified by the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery. Some of these physicians are also certified in other specialties, including surgery (92 percent).

Seventy-four percent of the respondents said they were attracted to orthopaedic surgery while in medical school. Many of them also considered other surgical specialties such as general surgery (84 percent) and internal medicine (32 percent).

Most of the respondents said they are quite pleased with their choice of specialty. Ninety-five percent indicated that they are either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied, while only two percent said they are dissatisfied with orthopaedics.

Perspectives

What aspects of orthopaedic surgery are most appealing?

These specialists said they find it rewarding to be able to “fix things” and, in most cases, obtain concrete, observable results that leave patients happy. Twenty-one percent of the orthopaedic surgeons surveyed said that the ability to successfully contribute to a patient's well-being appeals to them.

Eighteen percent indicated their ability to see rapid results as an appealing aspect. Sixteen percent like working with specific types of patients. “I see a variety of ages and conditions,” said one physician. “The ability to ‘fix’ or cure many problems provides for high patient satisfaction.” Another respondent indicated that, “This is a wonderful specialty which requires diligent work effort to become successful.”

What aspects of orthopaedic surgery are least appealing?

Like many surgeons, orthopaedists find some non-clinical aspects of medical practice unappealing. Thirty-four percent indicated concerns with managed care issues. One respondent said, “There are constant and excessive demands of insurance companies.”

Thirty-two percent of the orthopaedic surgeons said they dislike managing what they feel is an inordinate amount of paperwork. One physician said, “I have a bureaucratic nightmare with the paperwork including numerous administrative forms.” An additional 21 percent indicated that the on-call schedule can impact on your life.

What would you advise students to consider carefully before selecting orthopaedic surgery?

Twenty-four percent of the physicians participating in the survey pointed to the time commitment required to practice orthopaedic surgery. “Work involves a large commitment of

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time," explained one orthopaedic surgeon, "care is highly visible which increases your time demands from others."

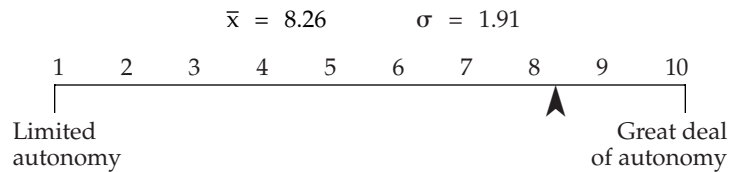
Eleven percent hoped students would look at the off hour demands, interruptions and emergencies that occur.

A few of the physicians expressed concern about parts of their practice which have little to do with medicine or surgery, including malpractice litigation, liability issues and the high cost of insurance premiums.

CRITICAL FACTORS

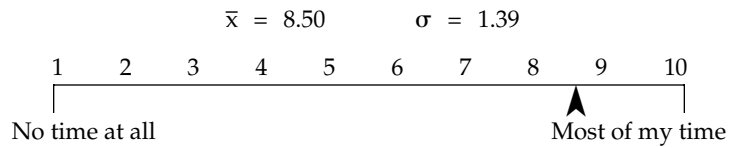
Autonomy

Eighty-five percent of the respondents said they experience a high degree of autonomy in their specialty, while only five percent feel their autonomy is limited. However, there is an indication that this is changing. "Autonomy varies with ones practice and amount of colleagues that you work with," explained one physician. "As the group practice I work in increases in size - I am unsure of the impact it will have on autonomy."



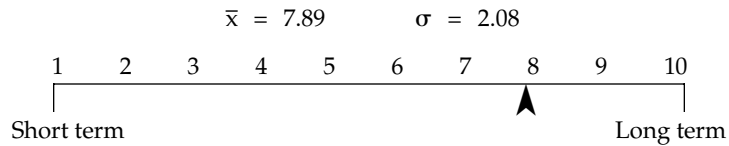
Caring for Patients

In general, orthopaedic surgeons are clinicians, not administrators. Most of the respondents (96 percent), office- and hospital-based physicians alike, said they spend most of their time caring for patients. None said they spend little time caring for patients. One said: "My time is for my patients, although the increase in paperwork is beginning to encroach on patient care."



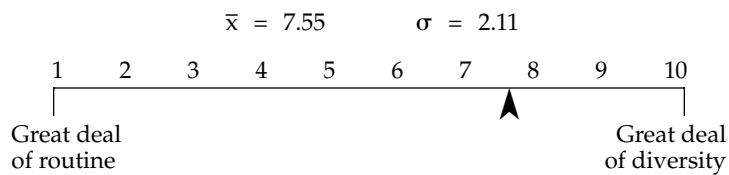
Continuity of Care

This specialty offers a moderate to high amount of continuity of patient care. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents reported having long-term patient relationships and eight percent short-term. One orthopaedic surgeon said: "Minor acute injuries require short follow-up and provide patient turnover, but major injuries provide long-term follow-up."



Diversity

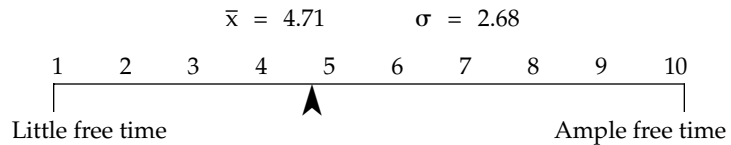
Eighty-one percent of the orthopaedic surgeons surveyed feel there is a great deal of diversity in their work, while only three percent said their work is mostly routine. Orthopaedic surgeons care for a wide range of patients who may have medical or surgical problems or both. "The diversity depends on how you choose to specialize," said one respondent. "General orthopaedics is very diverse while total joint specialists only do joint replacement procedures."



Family/Leisure Time

According to the survey, most orthopaedic surgeons spend a moderate amount of time with family and on leisure activities. Forty-five percent said they have little free time, and 21 percent said they have ample free time.

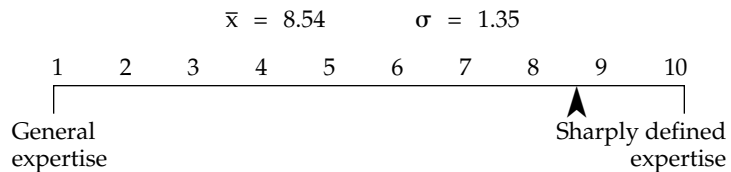
As usual, the type of practice often dictates how much leisure time these physicians enjoy. "It depends on one's degree of focus," explained one respondent. "The more you specialize, the greater your demand but there is a smaller patient mix that needs your expertise."



Focus of Expertise

Even though its focus is on one body system, orthopaedics encompasses a very broad area, making it difficult to be an expert in every aspect of it. Nevertheless, 89 percent of the surveyed physicians reported that their work requires sharply defined expertise. None said their work requires general expertise.

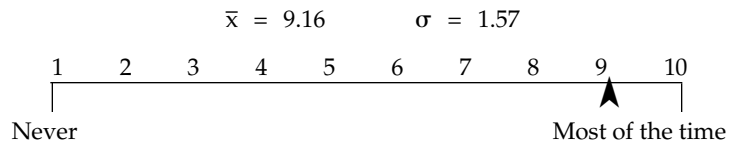
"Many orthopaedic procedures are very technique and instrument dependent and require a great deal of expertise," commented one physician.



Manual/Mechanical Activities

Not surprisingly, most survey participants (89 percent) said orthopaedic surgery demands a lot of manual/mechanical activity. It requires good manual dexterity, not only in open surgery, but in other activities as well, including casting and fracture manipulation. Work may range from the gross (total hip or knee replacements) to the delicate (hand and spine surgery).

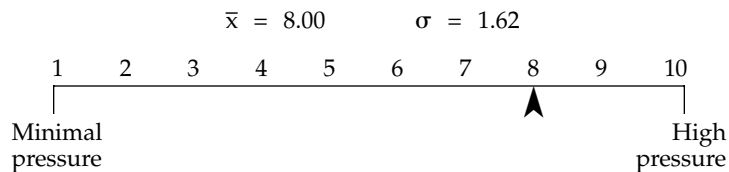
“This is without a doubt a manual and mechanical tasks specialty,” said one physician.”



Pressure

Survey participants, on average, said moderate to high pressure accompanies orthopaedic practice. Sixty-six percent experience fairly high pressure in their work, while only three percent experience minimal pressure. Among the sources of stress are long hours, an active on-call schedule, emergency room work and the threat of malpractice litigation.

One respondent pointed out that, “Most pressure is related to liability concerns.”



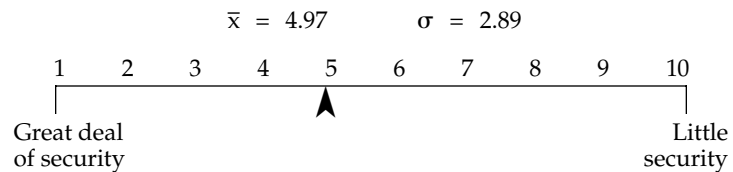
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The orthopaedic surgeons surveyed spend their week as follows:

Activities	Average Hours Per Week
Patient care	44
On call	25
Administrative activities	3
Professional travel (i.e., en route to hospitals, meetings)	4
Professional activities (i.e., teaching, consulting, research)	3
Continuing education	2
Community service activities	2

Security

Although the respondents generally feel secure in their work, some are concerned about the future of orthopaedic surgery. - Thirty-seven percent of the respondents reported being confident of their position and income, while the identical percent reported feeling little security. This concern about the future seems to be the result of the non-clinical aspects of medicine — high malpractice premiums and the constant threat of law-suits.



Patient Characteristics and Types of Illnesses

The respondents mostly treat adults. Obviously, those with a special interest in pediatric orthopaedics have a greater proportion of younger patients, while those with expertise in joint replacements tend to have older patients.

**Age Group of Patients
Average (%)**

Infants	3
Children	17
Adults	46
Elderly	34

The survey participants treat slightly more females (55 percent) than males (45 percent). Fifty-seven percent of their patients are classified as being generally healthy, 18 percent acutely ill, 20 percent chronically ill and 3 percent terminally ill. Fifty percent work in a hospital environment and 47 percent are affiliated with a group practice.

The conditions orthopaedic surgeons most commonly treat are:

1. Fractures
2. Knee trauma
3. Arthritis
4. Carpel tunnel
5. Hip problems

Among the conditions they find most challenging to treat are:

1. Spine problems
2. Joint problems
3. Trauma
4. Hip problems
5. Knee problems

Malpractice Premiums

In 1998, the median liability insurance premium for orthopaedic surgeons was \$30,800. This varies among practice settings.

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Training Requirements

There are 157 accredited programs in orthopaedic surgery, according to the AMA's 1999-2000 Graduate Medical Education Directory. Orthopaedic surgeons are required to have five years of residency training; the first year consists of a combination of broad based surgical, medical, and orthopaedic education, while the last four years consist primarily of intensive orthopaedic training.

The certification exam given by the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery exam is given in two parts: Part I is a written exam which may be taken anytime after the completion of the residency educational requirements; Part II of the board exam is oral and may be taken after the surgeon has practiced for 22 months.

Certification is valid for 10 years.

Professional Organizations

American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery
400 Silver Cedar Court
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
Phone: (919) 929-7103
Fax: (919) 942-8988
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American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
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Toll Free: (800) 346-AAOS
Phone: (847) 823-7186
Fax: (847) 823-8125
Email: member@aaos.org
www.aaos.org

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Getting into a Residency: A Guide for Medical Students, Kenneth V. Isserson, 4th edition, Galen Press Ltd., AZ, 1996.

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American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery, Inc., 1999 Brochure.

Mean Scores for Critical Factors

Autonomy	8.26	Manual/Mechanical	
Caring for Patients	8.50	Activities	9.16
Continuity of Care	7.89	Pressure	8.00
Diversity	7.55	Responsibility	9.35
Family/Leisure Time	4.71	Schedule	6.43
Focus of Expertise	8.54	Security	4.97
Income	7.76	Sense of	
Innovative Thinking	8.26	Accomplishment	9.18
Intellectual Content	5.43	Status Among	
Interacting with Other		Colleagues	8.03
Physicians	6.46		

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Exercise

After you have finished the above career option profile, please complete the following exercise:

- ◆ List your top five Critical Factors below;
- ◆ In Column A, list the rating you gave each of these factors in your Briefing Document;
- ◆ In Column B, list the mean scores for each factor as found in the above profile;
- ◆ Subtract the items in Column B from those in Column A and write the remainder in Column C;
- ◆ Total the numbers in Column C. **NOTE:** Ignore + and – signs.

The closer the number at the bottom is to “0,” the more likely it is that this specialty may be a match for you and requires your further investigation. This total alone, however, means very little until you have compared it with those from each specialty profile.

Critical Factors	A (Your Rating)	B (Mean Scores)	C (Differences)
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
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