

plastic surgery



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PLASTIC SURGERY

Background

Plastic surgery deals with the repair, reconstruction and replacement of physical defects of both form and function. This is perhaps the most glamorous of all medical specialties because of the cosmetic procedures used and because many of the clientele are rich and famous. However, the cosmetic aspect is only one part of the specialty. Plastic surgeons also treat a variety of clinical disorders, including congenital and developmental problems.

A foundation in surgical anatomy, physiology and pathology is fundamental to this specialty. Plastic surgeons need to have surgical knowledge, surgical judgment, technical expertise, ethics, the ability to think in three dimensions, good aesthetic sense, creativity, appreciation for detail and excellent interpersonal skills.

Profile

Of the 80 participants in the survey, 75 percent are certified by The American Board of Plastic Surgery. Ninety percent are also certified in surgery, and 25 percent in otolaryngology.

Many of the respondents (74 percent) were attracted to plastic surgery while studying medicine, but also considered other specialties while in school, such as surgery (94 percent), orthopaedic surgery (35 percent), and internal medicine (33 percent). Eighty-eight percent of the respondents are male (12 percent female) with an overall average age of 46.

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

Perspectives

What aspects of plastic surgery are most appealing?

According to the survey, the three most positive aspects of plastic surgery are: the intellectually stimulating work, which provides opportunities to learn something new (18 percent), the diversity the practice offers (15 percent) and the rewards of using the procedures and technical skills related to the specialty (14 percent).

“This is an applied art,” one respondent said. “The speciality offers one the chance to be creative and problem solve many different cases.” Another commented, “There is high patient contact, most of which are healthy, minimal nights, no week-ends, and independence.”

What aspects of plastic surgery are least appealing?

Thirty-six percent of the respondents cited problems with third-party payers and managed care companies. Eighteen percent indicated the large amount of paperwork as a growing concern.

“There are growing demands on my time for more difficult cases which leads to stress,” one plastic surgeon said. Another stressed that there are, “Too many legal considerations and malpractice suits.”

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

Most of the respondents find their careers rewarding. They enjoy knowing that the surgeries they perform not only make patients look better and feel better about themselves, but often help them function more effectively.

Eighteen percent of the respondents advised students to carefully consider the length of the training required for plastic surgery. Fourteen percent said lifestyle and career opportunities should be a consideration.

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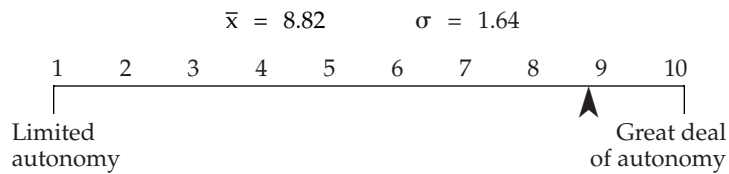
One physician said: "Make sure you are willing and able to take on difficult problems and solve them creatively." "Most of your creativity is predominantly needed with reconstructive surgery." Another said: "You should have an artistic interest and ability as well as being a people person."

CRITICAL FACTORS

Autonomy

Eighty-five percent of the surveyed physicians said they experience a high degree of autonomy in their specialty. However, autonomy in plastic surgery is very dependent on your patient mix.

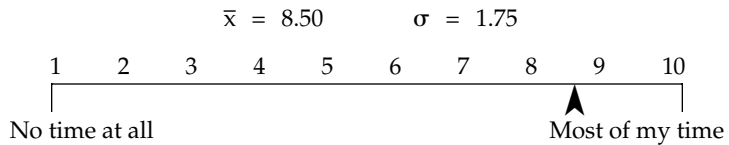
One respondent said, "In a group practice, communication is the key to keeping your autonomy." Another commented, "I have significant autonomy in patient care, but very limited autonomy with hospital policies."



Caring for Patients

These specialists devote most of their time seeing and caring for patients. Eighty-eight percent of them work directly with patients most of the time.

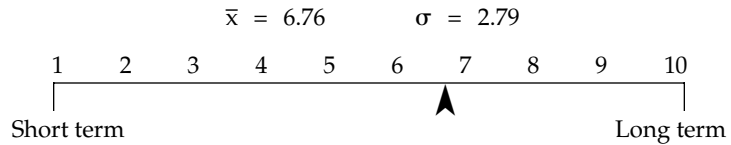
"I need to care for all of my patients and not rely on others" said one physician.



Continuity of Care

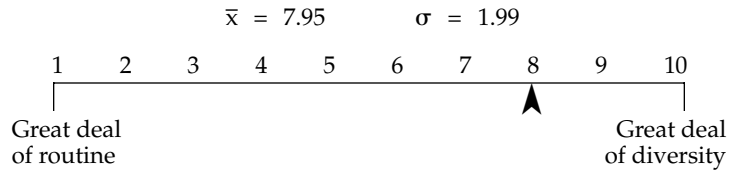
Fifty-five percent of the physicians surveyed said they provide mostly long-term care to patients, while 23 percent said they provide mostly short-term care.

One physician said: “My care runs the gamut from lesions on the face (short term) to breast reconstruction (long term).” Another physician said, “Patients come back for other work and bring their children if they need care as well.”



Diversity

Sixty-seven percent of the plastic surgeons surveyed said their work provides a great deal of diversity. Only seven percent said their work is mostly routine. “There is opportunity to operate on all ages, male and female, on all body parts,” said one physician.

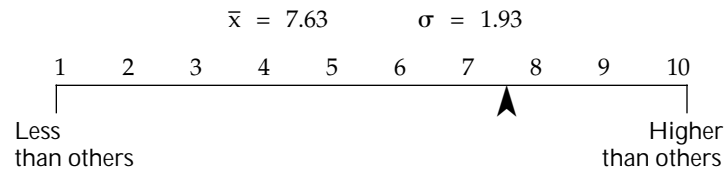


Income

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents said their income is higher than other specialists, while 14 percent said it is comparable to others.

One physician commented: "My income is very generous but one must consider the amount of money that goes to overhead for private practice."

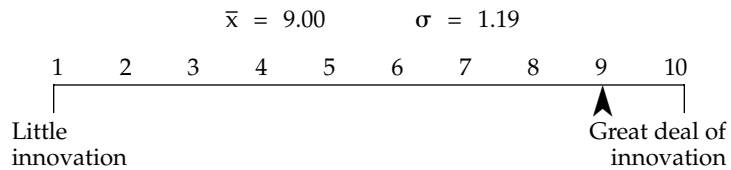
The average pre-tax income for the surveyed plastic surgeons from their 1998 medical practice was \$361,400.



Innovative Thinking

For obvious reasons, plastic surgeons must be very innovative in their work. Eighty-six percent of the respondents feel their work requires a great deal of innovation.

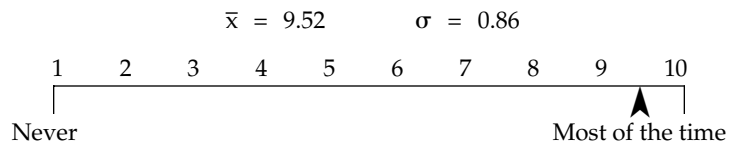
One physician said, "Those patients who have been involved with a serious car accident can lead to complex problems that require innovative approaches."



Manual/Mechanical Activities

Understandably, this specialty involves a large amount of manual/mechanical activities. Ninety-three percent of the plastic surgeons surveyed said they perform these types of activities most of the time.

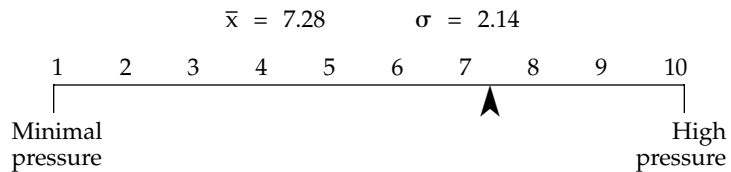
One respondent said, "Ninety percent of new patients require surgery"



Pressure

In general, the plastic surgeons surveyed indicated their work has a moderate amount of pressure. Fifty-two percent of them said they experience fairly high pressure. Ten percent reported experiencing minimal pressure.

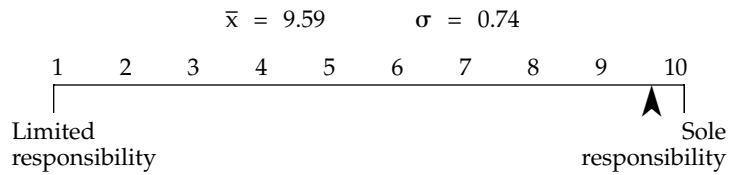
"It appears the biggest problem is dealing with other physicians in business relationships as some of these are being forced on us by managed care," one respondent explained. Another said: "I love it."



Responsibility

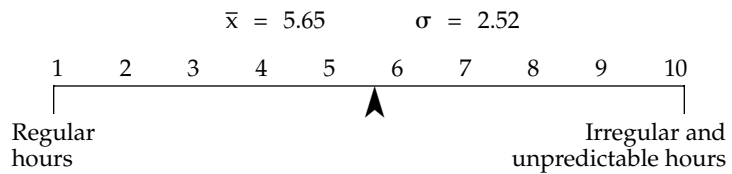
Ninety-eight percent of the respondents said they assume near-total responsibility for their patients. Taking full accountability for their actions is highly rewarding.

One physician's response was short, but echoed many others: "I am responsible for the outcome!"



Schedule

Twenty-six percent of the plastic surgeons surveyed said they work irregular and unpredictable hours, while 23 percent reported that they work regular hours. Plastic surgeons' hours may vary considerably, depending on whether they are on call solely for their post-operative patients or for the emergency room as well.



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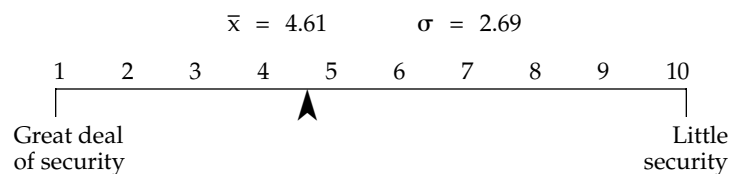
According to the survey, plastic surgeons spend their week as follows:

Activity	Average Hours Per Week
Patient care	45
On-call	35
Administrative activities	7
Professional activities (i.e., teaching, consulting, research)	4
Professional travel (i.e., en route to hospital, meetings)	3
Continuing education	3
Community service	1

Security

Many, but not all, of the survey respondents are confident of their future in plastic surgery. Fifty-four percent of them said they have a great deal of security, while 19 percent said they have little security.

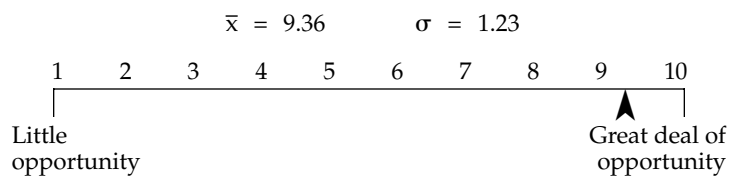
“Security comes from my personal feeling of competence,” said one respondent. However, another said, “There is high prestige but, the landscape is very competitive.”



Sense of Accomplishment

The survey participants strongly believe their work provides a sense of accomplishment. Ninety-seven percent of them said they have a great opportunity to see concrete end results.

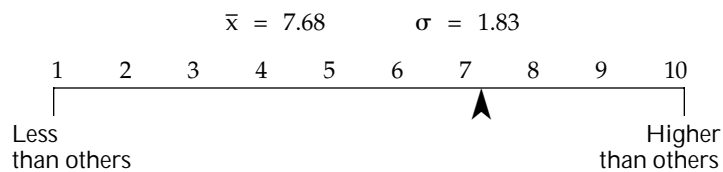
“This is the best aspect of plastic surgery,” said one respondent. Many others offered similar statements.



Status Among Colleagues

Sixty-eight percent of the respondents rated plastic surgery as being held in higher regard by their colleagues than most other specialties. Sixteen percent rated its status comparable to other fields.

One respondent said, “I consider myself a super specialist as I often need to correct what others have done.”



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Patient Characteristics and Types of Illnesses

The plastic surgeons surveyed said they treat adults and elderly patients most of the time.

Age Group of Patients Average (%)

Infants	5
Children	14
Adults	56
Elderly	26

They treat more women (66 percent) than men (34 percent). Seventy-five percent of their patients are classified as generally healthy, 12 percent acutely ill, 11 percent chronically ill and 2 percent terminally ill. Sixty-five percent work in a managed care environment.

The conditions pathologists most commonly treat are:

1. Skin cancers
2. Breast surgery
3. Liposuction
4. Cosmetic surgery
5. Trauma

Among the conditions they find most challenging to treat are:

1. Breast surgery
2. Cosmetic surgery
3. Cancer
4. Trauma
5. Hand surgery

Malpractice Premiums

The plastic surgeons surveyed paid an average of \$23,700 for malpractice insurance in 1998. This fee varies according to practice setting.

**Training
Requirements**

The American Medical Association lists 93 accredited programs in its 1999-2000 Graduate Medical Education Directory. For certification by the American Board of Plastic Surgery, candidates can either complete five years of an integrated plastic surgery residency or complete three years in a general surgery training program followed by two or three years of plastic surgery residency training, depending on the program.

For certification, a written exam and oral exam are given by the American Board of Plastic Surgery after completing the prerequisite residency requirements. Beginning in July 1997, there is no longer a 2 year independent practice requirement before being allowed to take the oral exam.

**Professional
Organizations**

Certification is valid for 10 years.
American Board of Plastic Surgery
Seven Penn Center
Suite 400
1635 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-2204
Phone: (215) 587-9322
Fax: (215) 587-9622
Email: info@abplsurg.org
www.abplsurg.org

American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, Inc.
444 East Algonquin Road
Arlington Heights, IL 60005
Toll Free: (800) 635-0635
Phone: (847) 228-9900
Email: webmaster@plasticsurgery.org
www.plasticsurgery.org

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Socioeconomic Characteristics of Medical Practice 1997/98, AMA Center for Health Policy Research, 1998.

Physicians Marketplace Statistics 1997/98, AMA Center for Health Policy Research, 1998.

Physician Characteristics and Distribution in the US, AMA 1999.

How to Choose a Medical Specialty, Anita D. Taylor, 2nd edition, W.B. Saunders Co., PA, 1993.

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

AAMC DATA BOOKS: Statistical Information Related to Medical Schools and Teaching Hospitals, AAMC, Washington DC, 1999.

The American Board of Plastic Surgery, Inc., Booklet of Information, July 1, 1998 - June 30, 1999.

Mean Scores for Critical Factors

Autonomy	8.82	Manual/Mechanical	
Caring for Patients	8.50	Activities	9.52
Continuity of Care	6.76	Pressure	7.28
Diversity	7.95	Responsibility	9.59
Family/Leisure Time	5.44	Schedule	5.65
Focus of Expertise	9.44	Security	4.61
Income	7.63	Sense of	
Innovative Thinking	9.00	Accomplishment	9.36
Intellectual Content	5.50	Status Among	
Interacting with Other		Colleagues	7.68
Physicians	5.19		

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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)
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
		Total:	_____