

Department Chair Gender as a Factor in Selection of a Residency Program

AM Becker, M.D., PW Kranner, M.D.

Department of Anesthesiology, University of Wisconsin

Introduction

Program Directors have long been interested in the factors involved in a candidate's choice of a residency program. We sought to determine whether the presence of a female Department Chair as a role model affects the likelihood of female candidates matching into a specific residency program.

Methods

The Society of Academic Anesthesia Chairs (SAAC) member listing was reviewed to identify anesthesiology departments with female Chairs. Identified programs were queried by telephone or e-mail regarding their current number of male and female residents. If the current Chair has been in place for fewer than four years the breakdown of residents by year of training and the gender of the previous Chair were also determined.

Results

Information was obtained from all fifteen departments identified as having female Chairs (15 of 132 total programs (11%)). Of those, nine (60%) have been the Chair since at least 2000 and therefore would have been involved in the recruiting and interviewing of all of the current residents. Of the 412 residents in these programs 117 (28%) were female. Chairs of the six remaining programs had been in place for 1-3.5 years, and therefore would have been involved in the recruitment of only a subgroup of the current residents. Overall, these programs consisted of a total of 219 residents with 56 females (26%). A detailed breakdown of the residents by training year was obtained from five of the six programs. In only one instance did the percentage of female residents increase dramatically since the start of the new Chair, although gender was not an issue as the prior Chair was female as well.

Discussion

Numerous formal and informal surveys have been conducted to determine the factors important to residency candidates as they evaluate and select a training program. Goulson and Bowe¹ surveyed applicants to their anesthesiology program and found that the quality of clinical teaching, strength of the faculty, and opinions of the current residents were of greatest importance. The surgical literature has specifically addressed the role of women as role models in residency selection. Mayer et.al.² surveyed residents in a general surgery program with a high percentage of female residents and showed a strong role for successful female faculty role models. We surmised that this would hold true in anesthesiology programs as well, with the presence of a female Chair as a role model leading to a higher percentage of female residents. Our data, however, reveals an average in this subset of programs closely in line with the 27% prevalence of females in anesthesiology programs as a whole³. Given the substantially higher percentage of women currently entering American medical schools, the recruitment of women into anesthesiology and the factors governing their choice of a residency position will continue to be of interest.

References

1. Goulson DT, Bowe EA. Important factors in selecting a residency program. *Journal of Education in Perioperative Medicine* 3(1). May-August 2001.
2. Mayer KL, Perez RV, Ho HS. Factors affecting choice of surgical residency training program. *Journal of Surgical Research* 98(2). June 2001.
3. Grogono AW. Resident numbers and total graduating from residencies and nurse anesthesia schools in 2003: Continuing shortages expected. *ASA Newsletter* 67(11). November 2003.