

Graham Center Policy One-Pager

Female Family Physicians May Earn \$1.8 Million Less Than Male Peers Over a Lifetime

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The average salaries of female physicians are lower than those of their male peers. Previous studies demonstrate that female family physicians earn approximately 16% less than their male counterparts.¹ However, multiple studies have demonstrated benefits of having a female physician, including quality of care and relationships.^{2,3} After controlling for multiple variables, the wage gap persists, making gender biases the most likely explanation.

The authors performed a PubMed and Google Scholar literature search for articles published since 2010 on the gender wage gap for any physician specialty. Relevant research analyses, commentaries, and editorials were included. The main theme of each article was identified and the number of articles were tabulated for each. Main themes and subthemes were verified by two authors. Earlier studies and the 2020 Medscape Family Medicine Physician Compensation Report were used to estimate the lifetime wage disparity the average female family physician may experience due to lack of pay equity.⁴

Fifty-five unique articles were identified that addressed the gender pay gap (eTable A); these included three blog posts, 11 commentaries or editorials, one expert review, one guideline, one lay press, 27 original research articles, and seven white papers. One article was unable to be

retrieved. Sixteen articles specifically addressed primary care specialties. Table 1 lists themes found in the identified articles. Subthemes were mentioned in the analysis as secondary measures but were not the primary outcome. Of the 27 research articles, 15 explored whether the gender pay gap persisted despite a main theme; the wage gap persisted in every article.

Based on an average annual family physician income of \$243,000,⁴ the assumption of regular pay without significant increases, a 16% difference in pay, and the controlling for 2.9% annual

TABLE 1

Themes Identified in Articles on Gender Pay Gap in the Primary Care Setting

Primary theme	No. of articles addressing the primary theme	Subthemes also addressed
Physician specialty	10	Specialty Specialty pay level Subspecialty training
Productivity	10	Academic productivity Clinical trial participation Medicare reimbursements National Institutes of Health funding Number of patients seen per week Publications Research time Work hours
Practice/institutional characteristics	8	Academic setting Institutional characteristics Practice characteristics Practice ownership

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This series is coordinated by Kenny Lin, MD, MPH, deputy editor.

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Author disclosure: No relevant financial relationships.

TABLE 1 (continued)

Themes Identified in Articles on Gender Pay Gap in the Primary Care Setting

Primary theme	No. of articles addressing the primary theme	Subthemes also addressed
Physician demographics	6	Age Marital status Number of children Race Spousal employment
Career advancement	4	Academic advancement Academic/faculty rank Leadership positions
Physician experience (years in practice)	4	Experience Years since residency graduation
Compensation model	2	Compensation method
Personal preferences	2	Work-life balance
Practice location	2	Area where physicians practice Medical school location Region of United States

inflation, male family physicians will earn \$1.84 million more than female family physicians over a 30-year career.

Literature demonstrates that frequently conjectured reasons for lack of gender pay parity, such as “women elect to work fewer hours” or “female physicians are less productive than their male peers,” are not supported by evidence. In contrast, gender biases emerged in the wage gap literature multiple times. Clinic and health system leaders should be aware that this gap exists, recognize the value of female family physicians, and create mechanisms to ensure adequate and equitable pay. Solutions to the pay gap include transparent pay structures, value-based payment models, changing models for career and academic advancement, and promoting women in the workplace. Addressing gender bias requires broad education, advancement of women, and recognition of the nonmeasured skills of female physicians.

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eTABLE A

Articles Addressing Gender Pay Gap

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eTABLE A (continued)

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