Influence of Negotiation and Practice Setting on Salary Disparities between Male and Female Physician Assistants

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Background: The gender gap has been reported in many professions. Analyses of national salary figures between male and female physician assistants (PAs) have been published. Starting salary differences can have a compounded effect on one’s lifetime career earnings as can number of hours worked per week, years of experience, practice specialty, and location of practice setting (rural vs urban). Evaluations of differences in practice settings and negotiation strategies on starting salary outcomes and the role gender may play in these differences have not been fully investigated. If gender is associated with willingness or likeliness to negotiate, use of more or less effective negotiation strategies, or choice of practice setting, this could partly explain the gender gap.

Purpose: Investigate associations between gender and willingness or likeliness to negotiate, use of more or less effective negotiation strategies, choice of practice setting and salary.

Methods: A list of all registered active PAs licensed in KS and practicing in KS, MO, OK, CO, or NB were obtained from the Kansas Board of Healing Arts (n=912); email address were available for 437 of these. The survey asked direct questions regarding age, gender, years of experience, hours worked per week, practice specialty/setting, community size, current salary and benefits, and previous experience with negotiation. A 31-question, previously published, validated, Likert scale survey was used to measure the likelihood of using different negotiation strategies (collaborating, competing, compromising, accommodating, and avoiding). The study was approved by the WSU IRB; completion of the survey indicated consent. Descriptive data are reported as means, standard deviation, frequencies, and percentages. Data were analyzed using t-test, Chi-square and Spearman rank tests as appropriate.

Hypothesis Statement: Lower annual salary among PAs will be associated with female gender, lower willingness and likeliness to negotiate salary, use of less effective negotiation strategies, and choice of practice settings typically associated with lower salaries.

Benefits of Research: There is evidence that negotiation skills can be learned and practiced. Assuming that awareness of one’s willingness to negotiate or one’s choice of negotiation strategies can lead to the ability to change, the results of this study may support development of education and training to reduce the gender salary gap. Currently practicing PAs and new graduates may benefit from this knowledge and awareness through negotiation of economically fair employment contracts regardless of gender and although this research is aimed at PAs, results could be extrapolated to a number of other professions.