

Analysis of Academic and Demographic Characteristics of Orthopaedic Trauma Surgery Division Chiefs at Level 1 and 2 Trauma Centers in the United States

Bianca Audrey Duah, Sebastian Frontera, Aman Michael Andemichael, Brittany Haws¹, Mattie Raiford, Mina Botros, Catherine A Humphrey, Sandeep Soin¹, John T Gorczyca¹, John P Ketz

¹University of Rochester

INTRODUCTION:

The field of orthopaedic surgery has faced scrutiny for its lack of diversity in terms of race and gender among residency applicants and those in advanced leadership. However, little is known about orthopaedic trauma division chiefs' academic and demographic characteristics and what factors are deemed favorable in attaining said position. Being appointed as a division chief is an essential milestone for many orthopaedic surgeons, as it offers an opportunity to lead and transform departments and often serves as a steppingstone to subsequent leadership roles within institutions and orthopaedic societies. This study aims to examine the academic and demographic profiles of orthopaedic trauma division chiefs at all level 1 and 2 trauma centers, and assess the influence of fellowship location on their journey to becoming division chiefs.

METHODS: To identify every level 1 and 2 accredited trauma center in the United States (academic and community), we utilized an online listing of current level 1 and 2 trauma centers confirming their teaching and trauma level status¹ respectively, using the American Hospital Directory. To identify division chiefs/chairs of orthopaedic trauma, we conducted thorough searches on osteopathic and allopathic residency program websites, respective trauma center websites, the Orthopaedic Trauma Association website, LinkedIn and Doximity. Our data collection encompassed various demographic factors such as race, age, and gender. Academic characteristics were also evaluated, including the current institution, hospital type, medical school attended, degree type earned (DO/MD), residency location, master's degree and/or Ph.D. attainment, research fellowship participation (e.g., AO Traveling Fellowship), fellowship location and subspecialty, years of practice, years between fellowship and division chief position, number of publications and citations, program director status (residency or fellowship), and service as a past or current orthopaedic society president. Patient satisfaction scores were obtained from Healthgrades and Healthline.

RESULTS:

Out of the 172 Level 1 trauma centers we identified, 130 orthopaedic trauma division chiefs/chairs were readily identifiable. Most division chiefs were male (91.5%) and White (87.7%), with an average age of 54 years. On average, male chiefs are 11.6 years older than female chiefs (54.8 vs. 43.2). Within the realm of Level 1 Trauma centers, only four division chiefs identified as Black/African-American, four as Asian, two as Hispanic/Latino, and two as Middle Eastern. Male chiefs, on average, took 3.3 more years to reach the position than female chiefs (9.9 vs. 6.6).

On average, these 130 orthopaedic traumatologists have been in practice for 24.3 years. The majority held the academic ranks of either professor or associate professor, while a smaller number were assistant professors. Among them, 29 had additional leadership positions within their departments, including program director (residency and/or fellowship), and 11 had attained or were actively pursuing additional graduate degrees. Male chiefs, on average, also published and had more citations than female chiefs (82.9 vs. 33.3 publications and 3,343.8 vs. 1,118.8 citations). The average duration between fellowship completion and assuming the division chief role was 9.6 years. Eighteen division chiefs had participated in at least one traveling fellowship, and 14 had served as presidents of Orthopaedic Trauma or Orthopaedic Societies. On average, division chiefs had published 80 papers with 3,191 citations. The most common fellowship locations, in order, were R Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center (15), UC Davis Medical Center (6), University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (5), and Hospital for Special Surgery (4).

Out of the 134 level 2 trauma centers identified, 60 trauma chiefs were readily identifiable. On average, these 60 orthopaedic traumatologists have been in practice for 17.17 years. Most division chiefs were male (91.7%) and White (78.3%), with an average age of 50.7. At level 2 trauma centers, 6 chiefs identified as Black/African American, 4 as Asian, and 1 as Hispanic/Latino. On average, male chiefs are 10.7 years older than female chiefs (51.7 vs. 41). Male chiefs, on average, took 3.9 more years to reach the position than female chiefs (8.1 vs. 4.2).

Like level 1 trauma centers, most held academic ranks of professor or associate professor, with a smaller percentage being assistant professors. Three division chiefs held additional leadership positions, including program director, and two had pursued additional graduate degrees. Male chiefs, on average, also published and had more citations than female chiefs (33.9 vs. 3.2 publications and 1,694.1 vs. 49.8 citations). The average time between fellowship completion and assuming the division chief position was 7.8 years. Two division chiefs had participated in at least one traveling fellowship, and one had served as an Orthopaedic Trauma or Orthopaedic Society president. On average, division chiefs had published 30.6 papers with 1,521 citations. The most common fellowship locations, in order, were UC Davis Medical Center (5), UCSD (4), R Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center (3), and Florida Orthopaedic Institute (2).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: Our study revealed that orthopaedic trauma division chiefs tend to be older than 50 years, male, and White. They typically train at high-volume trauma and academic centers, particularly in major cities.

Additionally, a significant number of division chiefs have served as presidents of Orthopaedic Trauma or Orthopaedic Societies. While the number of those underrepresented in orthopaedics continues to reveal a paucity in diversity, it appears that those who are able enter leadership roles attain their positions at a younger age and in less time following the start of their practice. The findings emphasize the urgent need to address the gender and racial/ethnic diversity gap in orthopaedic trauma division chief leadership to reflect the evolving landscape of orthopaedics better.