

Trends in Orthopaedic Surgeon Compensation: A Comparative Analysis over Twenty Years

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INTRODUCTION:

Healthcare finance in the United States is continually changing with increased consolidation of health care organizations, fluctuating reimbursement cycles, and shifting institutional and federal policy. The economics of practicing medicine is dynamic and challenging relative to other professions. The purpose of this study is to analyze compensation trends in orthopedic surgery over the past 20 years compared to other professions.

METHODS:

Income data for orthopedic surgeons and other professions every five years from 2000 to 2020 was collected from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics and peer-reviewed literature. Income data were adjusted for inflation and analyzed to identify trends in compensation.

RESULTS: The rate of absolute income trajectory over two decades for orthopedic surgeons when adjusted for inflation was -38%. Outside of healthcare professions, economists, lawyers, and engineers saw some of the highest increases with inflation adjusted increases of +31%, 26%, and 24%, respectively (Figure 1) Orthopaedic surgeon salary rates declined the most of all professions analyzed, including all healthcare workers (Table 1, Figure 2).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: Adjusted orthopedic surgeon compensation has declined significantly in the two decades between 2000 to 2020. Compared to other high-skilled professions, Orthopedic compensation showed the greatest decline in adjusted rates over time. This trend carries significant implications for the future of the field, potentially affecting recruitment, satisfaction, burnout, and patient access to care. It underscores the need for a reevaluation of compensation models in orthopedic surgery to ensure sustainability.

Figure 1: Absolute compensation rates relative to inflation every five years 2000-2020

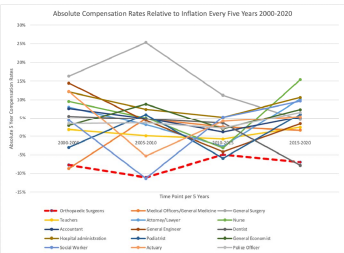


Figure 2: Cumulative compensation rates relative to inflation 2000-2020

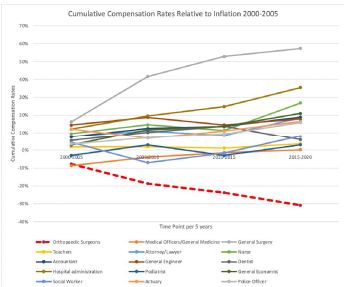


Table 1: Additive rates of absolute difference relative to inflation

	2000-2005	2005-2010	2010-2015	2015-2020
Orthopaedic Surgeons	-48%	-25%	-24%	-33%
Medical Officers/General Practitioners	-9%	-4%	-1%	0%
General Surgery	36%	42%	53%	57%
Teachers	2%	2%	1%	4%
Attorney/Lawyer	8%	11%	8%	19%
Nurse	20%	15%	11%	27%
Accountant	8%	13%	14%	19%
General Engineer	14%	19%	15%	18%
Dentist	5%	10%	14%	6%
Hospital administration/Medical Management	12%	20%	25%	35%
Podiatrist	-3%	3%	-3%	3%
General Economist	3%	12%	14%	23%
Social Worker	4%	-7%	-2%	8%
Actuary	12%	7%	11%	16%
Police Officer	3%	7%	9%	16%