

Trends in Financial Compensation for Academic Sports Medicine Surgeons in the United States

Julian Smith-Voudouris, Katie Margale Zehner, Joshua Guillermo Sanchez, Jonathan N Grauer, Arya Giri Varthi

INTRODUCTION: As United States healthcare spending continues to increase, surgeons face elevated patient volumes amidst greater financial pressures. How these systemic changes have influenced trends in compensation for academic sports medicine surgeons remains unclear. The current study sought to analyze national trends and distribution of academic orthopaedic sports medicine surgeon total compensation in relation to academic rank and gender.

METHODS:

Faculty compensation benchmarks were obtained from the 2016 to 2024 American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) Faculty Salary Surveys. Total financial compensation data for orthopaedic sports medicine surgeons were extracted, and median salaries were stratified by year, academic rank, and surgeon gender (gender specific data available from 2022 to 2024 only).

Annual median compensation was analyzed by academic rank, and average percent change in compensation per year calculated. This was then repeated after stratification by surgeon gender. Gender compensation differences in 2024 were assessed by a cents-on-the-dollar approach, calculated by the ratio of median compensation for women to that of men. To estimate the impact of these differences, cumulative career earnings between men and women was extrapolated with 2024 benchmarks (using net present value analysis), assuming a 30-year academic career, an 8-year interval to promotion, and a 3% discount rate to account for inflation. Compensation trends were also forward projected to estimate when equity would be achieved.

RESULTS:

From 2016-2024, annual median compensation for academic sports medicine surgeons increased across all academic ranks: +3.72% for assistant professors, +1.63% for associate professors, +3.35% for professors, +3.86% for chiefs, and +2.65% for chairs. Compared to U.S. inflation which averaged 3.22% annually during the same period, compensation changes exceeded inflation for the ranks of assistant professor (+0.5%), professor (+0.13%), and chief (+0.64%) and lagged for associate professors (-1.59%) and chairs (-0.57%).

Since 2022, women have been undercompensated relative to men on average. In 2024, women earned \$0.79 for every dollar earned by men at the assistant professor level and \$0.77 at the professor level, while earning slightly more than men as associate professors (\$1.01). Over a 30-year career, this disparity would translate to an estimated \$2.16 million less in cumulative earnings for women.

At the same time, from 2022-2024, compensation for women increased at a greater annual rate than for men across all ranks: assistant professor (+4.18% vs. +0.76%), associate professor (+12.89% vs. -0.10%), and professor (+9.40% vs. +0.85%). If these same trends continued, projected compensation parity could be achieved in 9 years for assistant professors and in 5 years for professors (already achieved for associate professors).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: Compensation for academic orthopaedic sports medicine surgeons has approximately kept pace with inflation, though varied by rank. While women surgeons continue to earn less than men on average, recent trends show greater annual growth in compensation for women, and it is estimated that these differences will be closed over time.