

# A 25-Year Analysis on the Prevalence of Orthopaedic Surgeons Opting Out of Medicare Relative to Physicians from Other Specialties

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**INTRODUCTION:** Increasing administrative burdens and decreasing reimbursements associated with Medicare have prompted many physicians to opt out of Medicare. This study assessed the prevalence and characteristics of orthopaedic surgeons who opted out of Medicare relative to physicians from other specialties.

**METHODS:** This was a cross-sectional analysis of orthopaedic surgeons utilizing data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The CMS provided the names of orthopaedic surgeons who opted out of Medicare as well as their practice locations from 2000 to 2025. CMS data were used to calculate the prevalence of physicians opting out of Medicare in the 25 largest specialties by number of physicians. Additional physician characteristics were collected from publicly available resources.

**RESULTS:** From 2000 to 2025, there were 330 orthopaedic surgeons who opted out of Medicare, which increased over the study period (0% to 1.9%, Figure 1,  $P < 0.001$ ). The top orthopaedic subspecialties represented in the Medicare opt-out group were spine surgery (30.6%), general orthopaedic surgery (25.8%), and orthopaedic sports medicine (20.9%). Most orthopaedic surgeons opted out of Medicare at later career stages including between 25-29 years (19.7%) and  $\geq 30$  years (44.5%) after medical school graduation (Figure 2). The Northeast (3.4%) and Midwest (0.9%) had the highest and lowest Medicare opt-out rates, respectively ( $P < 0.001$ ). The states with the highest Medicare opt-out rates were New York (7.2%), New Jersey (5.3%), and Arizona (3.7%). Relative to the 25 largest specialties by number of physicians, orthopaedic surgery ranked tenth by Medicare opt-out rate (1.9%). Psychiatry (21.1%) infectious disease (0.1%) ranked first and last, respectively.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:** The rate of Medicare non-participation in the orthopaedic surgery workforce is currently small but increasing. Several characteristics were associated with Medicare non-participation in orthopaedic surgery including spine surgery and geographies in the Northeast. Future investigation is needed to understand underlying motivations behind physicians opting out of Medicare.

