

## **Who Gets Paid? Analyzing the Top Industry-Earning Orthopaedic Surgeons**

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**INTRODUCTION:** The financial relationship between physicians and industry remains a source of scrutiny, particularly in surgical fields where device use is high. Although the CMS Open Payments Database has improved transparency, it remains unclear which factors drive the highest levels of industry compensation in orthopaedics. Understanding who gets paid and what factors might influence that may help surgeons navigate the landscape of industry engagement and shed light on patterns that extend beyond performance or productivity. This study examines how demographic, regional, and career-related factors relate to payments from the ten largest orthopaedic device companies.

**METHODS:** This cross-sectional analysis identified the 30 highest-paid orthopedic surgeons from each of the 10 largest orthopedic device companies, using the 2023 CMS Open Payments database. Subspecialty, fellowship completion year, and h-index were collected from public sources. Associations between demographics and total payments were assessed using t-tests, ANOVA, and multivariable linear regression.

**RESULTS:** Among the 300 highest-compensated orthopaedic surgeons in 2023, 99% were male. Median years in practice was 26, and median H-index was 21 (IQR 7–44). Most common fellowships were spine (49%), adult reconstruction (31%), and sports medicine (11%). Median total industry compensation was \$240,599.10 (IQR \$77,974.40–\$1,064,727.14). Pediatric, spine, and sports fellowships were associated with lower compensation. On multivariate analysis, male gender ( $p < 0.001$ ), Northeast region ( $p = 0.003$ ), adult reconstruction training ( $p = 0.008$ ), and years of experience ( $p < 0.001$ ) remained significant predictors; h-index was not.

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:**

Among the highest-paid orthopaedic surgeons, compensation was associated with gender, region, subspecialty, and experience but not academic productivity. These findings offer insight into how industry engagement is shaped and may help surgeons better understand the pathways to high-level compensation.