



## Information Update

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### Physician Assistant Income: Changes in Inflation-adjusted Total Annual Income from Primary Employer 2003-2004 and 2004-2005

#### Overview

Results of the 2005 AAPA Physician Assistant Census survey indicate that the mean total income from primary employer for clinically practicing PAs working full-time (32 or more hours per week) was \$81,129 (standard deviation \$21,254); the median was \$77,402. The mean total income in 2004 was \$78,257. Hence, the mean income for full-time clinically practicing PAs increased 3.7 percent between 2004 and 2005.

Measurement of the change in the incomes reported by the same individuals for two time periods, however, provides a superior basis for comparison of incomes because it accounts for a more complete constellation of static and dynamic characteristics of the respondents in each time period and permits for control of inflation.

This report presents the change in inflation-adjusted total annual income over the past three years using data reported by individuals who responded to the AAPA PA Annual Census survey for two consecutive years and who worked at least 32 hours per week for their primary employer. In other words, we examined data reported by full-time, clinically practicing PAs who responded in 2003 and 2004; or in 2004 and 2005. We were able to identify two cohorts of PAs (one cohort for each pair of years) who reported income, specialty, number of years as a PA, the geographic location of their employment, and their tenure in their current job, on both surveys. Thus, we were able to analyze the inflation-adjusted change in income for two types of PAs: those who did not change jobs and those who did change jobs.

#### Methodology

As mentioned above, the income data analyzed for this report were collected on the 2003, 2004, and 2005 AAPA Physician Assistant Census surveys. Prior to performing any analyses, we adjusted the income data for inflation. The inflation figures used are shown in the table below. These figures reflect the Bureau of Labor Statistics' measurements of the Consumer Price Index (U.S. city average, all items, not seasonally adjusted) for a 12-month period ending in August of each year.

	2003-2004	2004-2005
Inflation Rate	2.654%	3.641%

Before performing any analyses, we also removed the following types of respondents:

- Those who reported working less than 32 hours per week as PAs
- Those who reported being self-employed as PAs
- Those who had not graduated in time to participate in the two surveys associated with each time period

We also examined the comparability of the PAs who responded in consecutive years and those who responded in either of the two years with regard to a set of personal and practice characteristics. The personal characteristics examined included age, race, and sex; the practice characteristics examined included specialty, employer type, primary practice setting, and number of hours worked per week. We did not observe a consistent pattern of statistically significant differences ( $p \leq .01$ ) between the groups of PAs who participated in consecutive surveys and those who responded to only one survey with respect to age, sex, specialty, or hours worked. However, we did

consistently observe statistically significant differences for three other variables. Generally speaking, these differences suggested that the groups of PAs who responded to both surveys included

1. Fewer non-white PAs (e.g., 9% v. 14%)
2. More PAs employed by group practices (e.g., 47% v. 42%)
3. More PAs working in a single-specialty group practice setting (e.g., 23% v. 20%)

While these differences are statistically significant, they are relatively small and not likely to substantially affect income levels. Consequently, we proceeded to calculate the change in inflation-adjusted total annual income from the primary employer reported by each PA who responded to two consecutive surveys for both distinct time periods: 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. We posit that there is little risk in generalizing these findings to encompass all of the PAs who were in practice during the time periods considered.

Our first examination focused on data for PAs who did not change jobs; the second set of analyses focused on PAs who did change jobs. We defined job changers as those PAs who reported working less than one year for their current primary clinical employer, those who reported working for one year for their current primary clinical employer but also reported a change in their primary employer type, and those who reported working in a different specialty field in the second year relative to the first year. In particular, we examined the contributions of the two most important factors related to PA income: specialty and years of experience. We also examined whether the metropolitan status of the work site was strongly related to changes in income and found that it was not. Table 1a presents the number and percent distribution of respondents who completed surveys in consecutive years and met the criteria for inclusion in this analysis by whether they changed jobs. Table 1b presents the distribution of fields of primary specialties both before and after the job change for those respondents who changed jobs during the reference period.

Table 1a. Number and Percent Distribution of Census Respondents Who Completed Census Surveys in Consecutive Years by Job Change Status

	2003-2004		2004-2005	
	n	%	n	%
Total	7743	100.0	8032	100.0
Did Not Change Jobs	6534	81.3	6831	79.3
Changed Jobs	1498	18.7	1781	20.7

Table 1b. Number and Percent Distribution of Census Respondents Who Completed Census Surveys in Consecutive Years and Changed Jobs by Field of Primary Specialty Before and After the Job Change

	2003-2004		2004-2005	
	n	%	n	%
Total	1486	100.0	1765	100.0
Stayed in PC	354	23.8	404	22.9
PC to Surg	56	3.8	52	2.9
PC to Other	229	15.4	214	12.1
Surg to PC	26	1.7	33	1.9
Stayed in Surg	215	14.5	357	20.2
Surg to Other	78	5.2	95	5.4
Other to PC	169	11.4	169	9.6
Other to Surg	75	5.0	64	3.6
Stayed in Other	284	19.1	377	21.4

## Results

As shown in Table 2, the mean percent change in inflation-adjusted total annual income has been positive for PAs who did change jobs as well as for those who did not change jobs.

Table 2. Mean Percent Change in Total Inflation-Adjusted Income from 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 by Whether PA Changed Jobs

	2003-2004		2004-2005	
	n	% Change	N	% Change
Did Not Change Jobs	6534	2.5%	6831	2.6%
Changed Jobs	1498	4.8%	1781	4.9%

PAs Who Did Not Change Jobs

Table 3 shows the mean percent changes in inflation-adjusted total annual income for groups of PAs defined by specialty, but who did not change jobs for the observed time periods. PAs in surgical subspecialties, general surgery, and the “other” category experienced increases slightly greater than the overall average. PAs in occupational medicine, general pediatrics, emergency medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, family/general medicine, and pediatric subspecialties experienced increases less than the overall average, yet still received pay increases greater than the rate of inflation.

Table 3. Mean Percent Change in Inflation-Adjusted Total Annual Income from Primary Employer for PAs Who Did Not Change Jobs, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005\*

	2003-2004		2004-2005	
	n	% Change	n	% Change
Total	6507	2.5%	6820	2.6%
Family/General Medicine	1993	1.9%	1935	2.1%
General Internal Medicine	453	3.0%	489	2.5%
Emergency Medicine	577	2.4%	614	2.0%
General Pediatrics	149	1.4%	162	0.9%
General Surgery	178	2.0%	206	3.6%
Internal Medicine Subspecialties	606	2.2%	709	2.5%
Pediatric Subspecialties	68	2.4%	85	2.1%
Surgical Subspecialties	1586	2.9%	1668	3.2%
Ob/Gyn	129	0.3%	145	2.0%
Occupational Medicine	176	2.0%	171	0.3%
Other	592	4.3%	636	4.3%

\* Excludes individuals who did not report specialty in either of the two years under examination, therefore, the total percent change could differ from the total reported in Table 2.

As shown in Table 4, of the PAs who did not change jobs, those with more years of experience received relatively smaller pay increases than those with fewer years of experience.

Table 4. Mean Percent Change in Total Inflation-Adjusted Annual Income from Primary Employer for PAs Who Did Not Change Jobs by Years in Clinical Practice as a PA, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005\*

	2003-2004		2004-2005	
	n	% Change	n	% Change
Total	6521	2.5%	6822	2.6%
1 to 2 Years	970	4.8%	954	5.1%
3 to 4 Years	1357	4.0%	1262	4.8%
5 to 11 Years	1905	2.1%	2251	1.8%
12 Years or More	2289	1.0%	2355	1.3%

\* Excludes individuals who did not report years of experience in either of the two years under examination, therefore, the total percent change could differ from the total reported in Table 2

Table 5 presents the mean percent change in inflation-adjusted income by field of primary specialty and years in clinical practice. Two of the of the specialty/experience cohorts (PAs in occupational medicine for 12 or more years and PAs in general pediatrics for 5-11 years) reported changes in income from 2004 to 2005 that did not surpass the rate of inflation.

Table 5. Mean Percent Change in Total Inflation-Adjusted Income from Primary Employer for PAs Who Did Not Change Jobs by Field of Primary Specialty and Years in Clinical Practice as a PA, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005

		2003-2004		2004-2005	
		n	% Change	n	% Change
Total		6494	2.5%	6811	2.6%
Family/general medicine	1 to 2 Years	253	3.9%	208	3.6%
	3 to 4 Years	347	4.5%	314	4.9%
	5 to 11 Years	647	1.6%	686	1.8%
	12 or More Years	742	0.4%	724	0.8%
General internal medicine	1 to 2 Years	64	4.6%	69	5.8%
	3 to 4 Years	78	5.7%	74	3.2%
	5 to 11 Years	129	2.0%	154	1.7%
	12 or More Years	182	1.9%	192	1.8%
Emergency medicine	1 to 2 Years	78	4.5%	69	7.3%
	3 to 4 Years	132	4.1%	103	3.8%
	5 to 11 Years	202	2.4%	242	1.1%
	12 or More Years	163	0.1%	200	0.2%
General pediatrics	1 to 2 Years	23	5.0%	24	3.3%
	3 to 4 Years	31	2.7%	26	0.0%
	5 to 11 Years	52	0.2%	59	-0.9%
	12 or More Years	43	0.2%	53	2.2%
General surgery	1 to 2 Years	37	2.2%	39	3.6%
	3 to 4 Years	40	1.0%	48	7.5%
	5 to 11 Years	40	4.3%	58	2.6%
	12 or More Years	61	1.1%	61	1.3%
Internal medicine subspecialties	1 to 2 Years	109	3.3%	122	3.4%
	3 to 4 Years	146	2.1%	157	4.3%
	5 to 11 Years	166	2.4%	222	1.9%
	12 or More Years	184	1.5%	206	1.1%
Pediatric subspecialties	1 to 2 Years	10	4.8%	17	4.6%
	3 to 4 Years	10	1.0%	11	3.5%
	5 to 11 Years	19	4.2%	25	1.7%
	12 or More Years	28	1.1%	32	0.4%
Surgical subspecialties	1 to 2 Years	271	5.8%	279	6.3%
	3 to 4 Years	379	4.1%	342	5.7%
	5 to 11 Years	418	2.2%	515	1.8%
	12 or More Years	516	1.2%	531	1.4%
Obstetrics and gynecology	1 to 2 Years	17	1.1%	22	4.7%
	3 to 4 Years	26	0.9%	27	1.7%
	5 to 11 Years	33	0.7%	44	0.1%
	12 or More Years	53	-0.6%	50	2.5%
Occupational medicine	1 to 2 Years	4	*	3	*
	3 to 4 Years	16	1.0%	17	3.6%
	5 to 11 Years	48	2.2%	46	1.8%
	12 or More Years	108	1.9%	104	-0.5%
Other	1 to 2 Years	98	8.6%	99	7.3%
	3 to 4 Years	147	5.4%	141	5.2%
	5 to 11 Years	143	3.7%	198	2.6%
	12 or More Years	201	1.9%	198	3.7%

Excludes individuals who did not report specialty or years of experience in either of the two years under examination, therefore, the total percent change could differ from the total reported in Table 2.

\* Percent change not calculated for cohorts with fewer than five observations.

PA's Who Changed Jobs

Next, we analyzed the changes in inflation-adjusted total annual income for PAs who reported changing jobs. Job changers were identified as those PAs who reported working less than one year for their current primary clinical employer, those who reported working for one year for their current primary clinical employer but who reported a change in their primary employer type, as well as those who reported working in a different specialty field in the second year relative to the first year.

The first analysis for job changers looked at whether the job change involved a change in the general field of primary specialty. We combined all specialties into three groups: primary care, surgery, and other (non-surgery, non-primary care). For this analysis, primary care was defined as family/general medicine, general internal medicine, general pediatrics, and obstetrics/gynecology. We then grouped respondents into nine categories based on the specialty groupings of their new job relative to their former job. These nine categories were

1. Stayed in primary care
2. Changed from primary care to surgery
3. Changed from primary care to other
4. Changed from surgery to primary care
5. Stayed in surgery
6. Changed from surgery to other
7. Changed from other to primary care
8. Changed from other to surgery
9. Stayed in other

The percent change in inflation-adjusted total annual income for those PAs who changed jobs during the years under examination is presented in Table 6. For the 2004-2005 respondents, each cohort had changes in income greater than the rate of inflation except those who changed from surgery to primary care (-1.5%); the largest changes were observed for PAs who changed from a primary care specialty in 2004 to a surgical specialty in 2005. All other groups of job changers as defined in this analysis experienced increases in inflation-adjusted total annual income of between 1 and 7.4 percent.

Table 6. Mean Percent Change in Total Inflation-Adjusted Income from Primary Employer for PAs Who Changed Jobs by Former and Current Field of Primary Specialty, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005

	2003-2004		2004-2005	
	n	% Change	n	% Change
Total	1486	4.8%	1765	4.9%
Stayed in Primary Care	354	4.2%	404	3.1%
Changed from Primary Care to Surgery	56	7.5%	52	11.7%
Changed from Primary Care to Other	229	7.6%	214	7.4%
Changed from Surgery to Primary Care	26	2.0%	33	-1.5%
Stayed in Surgery	215	6.7%	357	6.8%
Changed from Surgery to Other	78	4.7%	95	4.2%
Changed from Other to Primary Care	169	2.7%	169	1.0%
Changed from Other to Surgery	75	2.5%	64	3.3%
Stayed in Other	284	3.5%	377	5.7%

\* Excludes individuals who did not report specialty in either of the two years under examination, therefore, the total percent change could differ from the total reported in Table 2.

The next analysis involved changes in inflation-adjusted income by years in clinical practice for PAs who changed jobs. The trend observed here was similar to that of PAs who did not change jobs; those with more years of experience received relatively smaller pay increases than those with fewer years of experience.

Table 7. Mean Percent Change in Total Inflation-Adjusted Annual Income from Primary Employer for PAs Who Changed Jobs by Years in Clinical Practice as a PA, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005\*

	2003-2004		2004-2005	
	n	% Change	n	% Change
Total	1471	4.8%	1762	5.0%
1 to 2 Years	392	7.4%	491	6.0%
3 to 4 Years	326	7.0%	375	6.4%
5 to 11 Years	366	2.9%	537	4.6%
12 Years or More	387	2.4%	359	2.6%

\* Excludes individuals who did not report years of experience in either of the two years under examination, therefore, the total percent change could differ from the total reported in Table 2.

Finally, we examined the mean percent change in inflation-adjusted total annual income for PAs who changed jobs by the field of specialty of their new job relative to their former job in combination with their years in clinical practice as a PA. Due to the relatively small number of respondents who reported changing jobs, we defined the cohorts to be examined in terms of only two specialty categories: primary care and non-primary care. Table 8 shows the number of PAs and the mean percent change in inflation-adjusted total annual income for each of these cohorts.

Table 8. Mean Percent Change in Total Inflation-Adjusted Annual Income from Primary Employer for PAs Who Changed Jobs by Primary Care Status of Current and Former Job and Years in Clinical Practice as a PA, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005

		2003-2004		2004-2005	
		n	% Change	n	% Change
Total		1459	4.9%	1746	5.0%
Stayed in PC	1 to 2 Years	98	5.5%	124	4.4%
	3 to 4 Years	69	8.1%	62	5.1%
	5 to 11 Years	78	2.2%	125	2.4%
	12 or More Years	103	2.0%	87	1.1%
PC to Non-PC	1 to 2 Years	64	11.0%	49	12.7%
	3 to 4 Years	59	9.3%	51	9.3%
	5 to 11 Years	82	7.5%	100	8.2%
	12 or More Years	79	3.6%	65	4.0%
Non-PC to PC	1 to 2 Years	43	3.7%	44	0.3%
	3 to 4 Years	42	3.3%	42	0.0%
	5 to 11 Years	57	2.0%	66	-0.1%
	12 or More Years	51	1.7%	50	2.2%
Stayed in Non-PC	1 to 2 Years	182	8.2%	267	6.6%
	3 to 4 Years	155	6.5%	218	7.3%
	5 to 11 Years	147	1.0%	242	5.5%
	12 or More Years	150	2.1%	154	3.4%

\* Excludes individuals who did not report specialty or years of experience in either of the two years under examination, therefore, the total percent change could differ from the total reported in Table 2.