



## Information Update

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### Physician Assistant Income:

## Changes in Inflation-adjusted Total Annual Income from Primary Employer 2004-2005 and 2005-2006

### Overview

Results of the 2006 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 \$84,396 (standard deviation \$21,975); the median was \$80,356. The mean total income in 2005 was \$81,129. Hence, the mean income for full-time clinically practicing PAs increased 4.0 percent between 2005 and 2006.

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 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 2004 and 2005; or in 2005 and 2006. 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 2004, 2005, and 2006 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.

	2004-2005	2005-2006
Inflation Rate	3.641%	3.819%

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., 10% 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: 2004-2005 and 2005-2006. 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

	2004-2005		2005-2006	
	n	%	n	%
Total	8559	100.0	9453	100.0
Did Not Change Jobs	6797	79.4	7413	78.4
Changed Jobs	1762	20.6	2040	21.6

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

	2004-2005		2005-2006	
	n	%	n	%
Total	1746	100.0	2038	100.0
Stayed in PC	400	22.9	456	22.4
PC to Surg	52	3.0	69	3.4
PC to Other	208	11.9	310	15.2
Surg to PC	32	1.8	34	1.7
Stayed in Surg	355	20.3	332	16.3
Surg to Other	94	5.4	113	5.5
Other to PC	169	9.7	171	8.4
Other to Surg	64	3.7	83	4.1
Stayed in Other	372	21.3	470	23.1

## 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 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 by Whether PA Changed Jobs

	2004-2005		2005-2006	
	n	% Change	N	% Change
Did Not Change Jobs	6797	2.6%	7413	2.2%
Changed Jobs	1762	4.9%	2040	4.1%

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 family/general medicine, general internal medicine, internal medicine subspecialties, obstetrics and gynecology, and occupational medicine 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, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006\*

	2004-2005		2005-2006	
	n	% Change	n	% Change
Total	6786	2.6%	7407	2.2%
Family/General Medicine	1919	2.1%	1993	1.6%
General Internal Medicine	489	2.5%	474	1.3%
Emergency Medicine	608	1.8%	641	2.2%
General Pediatrics	162	0.9%	179	2.3%
General Surgery	205	3.6%	208	2.8%
Internal Medicine Subspecialties	709	2.5%	808	1.5%
Pediatric Subspecialties	85	2.1%	98	2.2%
Surgical Subspecialties	1664	3.2%	1948	3.0%
Ob/Gyn	145	2.0%	156	1.7%
Occupational Medicine	169	0.2%	179	1.4%
Other	631	4.3%	723	3.4%

\* 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, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006\*

	2004-2005		2005-2006	
	n	% Change	n	% Change
Total	6788	2.6%	7409	2.2%
1 to 2 Years	951	5.2%	1145	4.8%
3 to 4 Years	1254	4.8%	1216	3.9%
5 to 11 Years	2242	1.7%	2510	1.9%
12 Years or More	2341	1.2%	2538	0.6%

\* 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

Table 5 presents the mean percent change in inflation-adjusted income by field of primary specialty and years in clinical practice. One of the of the specialty/experience cohorts (PAs in general surgery with 12 or more years) reported changes in income from 2005 to 2006 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, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006\*

		2004-2005		2005-2006	
		n	% Change	n	% Change
Total		6777	2.6%	7403	2.2%
Family/general medicine	1 to 2 Years	206	3.6%	265	4.0%
	3 to 4 Years	310	5.0%	280	3.8%
	5 to 11 Years	681	1.8%	685	0.8%
	12 or More Years	719	0.8%	762	0.6%
General internal medicine	1 to 2 Years	69	5.8%	49	1.3%
	3 to 4 Years	74	3.2%	68	3.2%
	5 to 11 Years	154	1.7%	146	0.5%
	12 or More Years	192	1.8%	209	1.1%
Emergency medicine	1 to 2 Years	69	7.3%	76	6.7%
	3 to 4 Years	102	3.7%	85	3.6%
	5 to 11 Years	241	1.1%	275	1.7%
	12 or More Years	196	-0.2%	205	0.7%
General pediatrics	1 to 2 Years	24	3.3%	40	4.4%
	3 to 4 Years	26	0.0%	34	1.5%
	5 to 11 Years	59	-0.9%	43	2.1%
	12 or More Years	53	2.2%	62	1.5%
General surgery	1 to 2 Years	39	3.6%	59	6.6%
	3 to 4 Years	48	7.5%	34	3.7%
	5 to 11 Years	58	2.6%	49	2.1%
	12 or More Years	60	1.3%	66	-0.5%
Internal medicine subspecialties	1 to 2 Years	122	3.4%	157	3.0%
	3 to 4 Years	157	4.3%	142	1.9%
	5 to 11 Years	222	1.9%	285	1.2%
	12 or More Years	206	1.1%	224	0.6%
Pediatric subspecialties	1 to 2 Years	17	4.6%	19	1.9%
	3 to 4 Years	11	3.5%	15	2.1%
	5 to 11 Years	25	1.7%	30	3.7%
	12 or More Years	32	0.4%	34	1.0%
Surgical subspecialties	1 to 2 Years	279	6.3%	345	5.6%
	3 to 4 Years	341	5.7%	373	4.3%
	5 to 11 Years	514	1.9%	646	2.9%
	12 or More Years	529	1.3%	584	0.8%
Obstetrics and gynecology	1 to 2 Years	22	4.7%	25	3.0%
	3 to 4 Years	27	1.7%	24	4.1%
	5 to 11 Years	44	0.1%	46	1.9%
	12 or More Years	50	2.5%	61	0.1%
Occupational medicine	1 to 2 Years	3	*	16	6.9%
	3 to 4 Years	16	3.0%	8	3.3%
	5 to 11 Years	46	1.8%	45	1.8%
	12 or More Years	103	-0.7%	109	0.4%
Other	1 to 2 Years	98	7.6%	93	6.7%
	3 to 4 Years	140	5.3%	152	5.8%
	5 to 11 Years	196	2.5%	258	3.6%
	12 or More Years	197	3.6%	220	0.1%

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 PA's who reported changing jobs. Job changers were identified as those PA's 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 PA's who changed jobs during the years under examination is presented in Table 6. For the 2005-2006 respondents, each cohort had changes in income greater than the rate of inflation except those who changed from surgery to primary care (-0.1%); the largest changes were observed for PA's who changed from a primary care specialty in 2005 to a surgical specialty in 2006 (9.8%). All other groups of job changers as defined in this analysis experienced increases in inflation-adjusted total annual income of between 1.8 and 5.9 percent.

Table 6. Mean Percent Change in Total Inflation-Adjusted Income from Primary Employer for PA's Who Changed Jobs by Former and Current Field of Primary Specialty, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006\*

	2004-2005		2005-2006	
	n	% Change	n	% Change
Total	1746	4.9%	2038	4.1%
Stayed in Primary Care	400	3.1%	456	3.9%
Changed from Primary Care to Surgery	52	11.7%	69	9.8%
Changed from Primary Care to Other	208	7.3%	310	5.9%
Changed from Surgery to Primary Care	32	-1.2%	34	-0.1%
Stayed in Surgery	355	6.8%	332	4.2%
Changed from Surgery to Other	94	4.2%	113	3.1%
Changed from Other to Primary Care	169	1.0%	171	1.8%
Changed from Other to Surgery	64	3.3%	83	2.6%
Stayed in Other	372	5.6%	470	3.9%

\* 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 PA's who changed jobs. The trend observed here was similar to that of PA's 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, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006\*

	2004-2005		2005-2006	
	n	% Change	n	% Change
Total	1743	5.0%	2007	4.2%
1 to 2 Years	489	6.1%	515	6.5%
3 to 4 Years	371	6.4%	430	7.0%
5 to 11 Years	526	4.6%	629	2.5%
12 Years or More	357	2.6%	433	1.1%

\* 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, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006\*

		2004-2005		2005-2006	
		n	% Change	n	% Change
Total		1727	5.0%	2005	4.2%
Stayed in PC	1 to 2 Years	123	4.5%	133	4.8%
	3 to 4 Years	62	5.1%	102	7.7%
	5 to 11 Years	123	2.4%	123	1.3%
	12 or More Years	86	1.0%	90	1.7%
PC to Non-PC	1 to 2 Years	49	12.7%	74	10.5%
	3 to 4 Years	50	9.1%	65	9.2%
	5 to 11 Years	95	8.3%	140	6.4%
	12 or More Years	65	4.0%	99	2.5%
Non-PC to PC	1 to 2 Years	44	0.3%	46	6.0%
	3 to 4 Years	42	0.0%	44	1.2%
	5 to 11 Years	66	-0.1%	67	-0.2%
	12 or More Years	49	2.5%	46	-0.2%
Stayed in Non-PC	1 to 2 Years	266	6.6%	260	6.2%
	3 to 4 Years	215	7.3%	219	7.1%
	5 to 11 Years	238	5.4%	299	1.8%
	12 or More Years	154	3.4%	198	0.5%

\* 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.