

Where are the General Surgeons?

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As the overall demand for healthcare continues to rise, one might not be surprised that the need for General Surgeons continues to increase as well. However, the number of General Surgeons is declining which may affect healthcare negatively. For instance, not having enough General Surgeons can increase waiting lists significantly causing patients to wait for non-emergency procedures. The factors influencing the need for more General Surgeons include population increases and aging, lowered resident interest in General Surgery and the advancement of technologies.

The main factors influencing the demand for General Surgeons are the increasing US population and the rapidly growing age population. As the Baby-Boom generation continues to age and longevity increases, the demand for surgical services is increasing. Older individuals have higher rates of surgical procedures when compared to other age groups so it's inevitable that they will place a greater demand on General Surgeons. Plus, the expanding elderly population also includes General Surgeon physicians who are now looking to retire. The overall US population is also growing dramatically which will inherently place additional strains on General Surgeons. This problem suggests the need to attract more residents into General Surgery programs, but are they interested?

With high needs for General Surgeons and projected future growth, one might think General Surgery is an attractive specialty for newcomers. However, fewer and fewer residents are choosing to pursue this route. There are several reasons General Surgery is not as appealing to residents as it once was; the main factor being lifestyle such as set work hours and leisure time. Residents view General Surgery as more demanding and stressful than in other medical fields which is turning them away. Also, the training period for General Surgeon is longer than most other disciplines and there is a viewed inadequacy of income appropriate to workload. Increased female residents who are less likely than male counterparts to choose General Surgery may even be another reason for the decreased interest in General Surgery.

General Surgery continues to advance for the benefit of the patient. New technologies and instrumentation such as minimally invasive laparoscopic techniques reduce pain, healing time and costs. As new technologies develop, more conditions are able to be treated than ever before giving way to more patients. However, the continuous advancements in General Surgery has made it difficult for surgeons to stay abreast of the most up-to date technology and therapies. Therefore, a lot of General Surgeons are choosing to develop expertise in a subspecialty or super-subspecialty. Choosing a subspecialty enables a General Surgeon to focus in a specific surgical area which also tends to advance his or her career through the additional skills and training. Subspecialties definitely have their advantages for the General Surgeon. However, they are contributing to the decreasing number surgeons who practice generalized surgery.

As the field of General Surgery continues to be in high demand, the job outlook for General Surgeons looks bright. Several factors will continue to contribute to future demands for General Surgeons including the increased aging and overall population growth, the lack of residents entering General Surgery and the growth of new technologies. Of course, there are many unknowns, and it's hard to predict the future. However, one could say that current and future General Surgeons should expect to have successful and rewarding careers.

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