

Even highly qualified women in academic medicine paid less than equally qualified men

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Women conducting research in the life sciences continue to receive lower levels of compensation than their male counterparts, even at the upper levels of academic and professional accomplishment, according to a study conducted by the Mongan Institute for Health Policy at Massachusetts General Hospital. In their report in the April issue of *Academic Medicine*, the research team also finds differences in the roles female faculty members take as they advance in their careers.

"The [gender gap](#) in pay has been well documented, but what was not understood was whether academic accomplishments could overcome the pay gap," says Catherine DesRoches, DrPh, of the Mongan Institute, who led the study. "Our study found that, across the board, men are being paid substantially more than equally qualified and accomplished women at academic medical centers."

Previous studies that documented disparities in compensation and academic rank between male and female faculty members did not examine differences in professional activities, such as leadership positions held. The current study was designed to investigate whether professional activities differ by gender, whether professional productivity -reflected by scientific papers published - continued to vary, and if differences in salary would persist after accounting for professional activities.

In 2007 the researchers surveyed more than 3,000 randomly selected investigators from life science departments at the top 50 academic

medical centers receiving National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding in 2003 or 2004. The anonymous surveys included questions about respondents' professional activities - such as leadership positions at their universities, on federal panels or at scientific journals - total and recent numbers of publications and the journals they appeared in; the numbers of hours spent on all professional, scientific and clinical activities; and total compensation.

The results indicated that women who reached the rank of full professor worked significantly more hours per week than men of the same rank, a difference primarily accounted for by more time spent in administrative and other professional tasks and not patient care, teaching or research. There was no significant difference in hours worked among associate professors, but women at the assistant professor level worked fewer hours overall, primarily spending less time doing research. Even after controlling for the differences in academic ranking, research productivity and other personal characteristics, women earned from \$6,000 to \$15,000 less per year than men of similar levels of accomplishment.

"These differences may seem modest," DesRoches says, "but over a 30-year career, an average female faculty member with a PhD would earn almost \$215,000 less than a comparable male. If that deficit were invested in a retirement account earning 6 percent per year, the difference would grow to almost \$700,000 over a career. For department of medicine faculty, that difference could be almost twice as great."

While the study did not investigate reasons underlying the differences found by the survey, the researchers theorize that the greater number of professional responsibilities taken on by female full professors could result from organization's efforts to improve the diversity of their department and committee leadership. Salary discrepancies could result from continuing discriminatory practices or from the choices women

make regarding specialties.

"Women working in the life sciences should not assume they are being paid as much as equally qualified men, and academic institutions should look hard at their compensation and advancement policies and their cultures," says Eric G. Campbell, PhD, principal investigator of the study. "In the end, I suspect major systemic changes will be needed if we ever hope to achieve the ideal of equal pay for equal work in [academic medicine](#)." Campbell is an associate professor of Medicine and DesRoches an assistant professor at Harvard Medical School.

Provided by Massachusetts General Hospital

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