



D58 Survey of Physician Members of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the demography of physician members of AAFS, their workloads, satisfaction with the Academy and its Section and suggestions for improvements.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by providing demographic information hitherto unavailable concerning physician members of the Academy, their interests and activities in the forensic sciences, levels of satisfaction with their sections and programs, workloads, and suggestions for change.

In July 2003, there were 983 physician members of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. Most are residents of the United States, but 130 physician members reside outside the U.S. on all six continents in 39 countries ranging from Azerbaidzhan to the United Arab Emirates. The largest number of them live in Canada, followed by France and Italy (tied for second) and Australia and Switzerland (tied for third). As one would expect, the largest number of non-U.S. physicians are found in Pathology/Biology, the largest section. But the largest percentage of non-U.S. physician members are in Criminalistics (7 of 9) and the General Section (16 of 34).

All but one of the ten sections of the Academy claim at least one physician member. The 101 physicians in Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences must, by requirement, be psychiatrists or in residency training in that discipline. Of the 823 physician members in the Pathology/Biology section, the vast majority are specialists in pathology. But of the minority group in Path/Bio and of the physicians scattered in other sections (General, 34; Criminalistics, 9; Jurisprudence, 5; Toxicology, 4; Odontology, 3; Physical Anthropology, 3; Engineering, 1) little has been known. To partially remedy this situation a questionnaire was developed and, with the generous cooperation of Headquarters staff, circulated to every physician member and then re-circulated five weeks later. A 33.4% response was achieved. Response rate by section was: Path/Bio, 35%; Psych/Behav, 33%; General, 44%; Phys Anthropol, 67%; Jurisprudence, 40%; and Odontology, 33%. Unfortunately physician members of Criminalistics, Engineering and Toxicology did not return the questionnaire.

The majority of AAFS physicians identify themselves as pathologists and psychiatrists, of whom 80% and 89%, respectively, claim board certification. Nineteen of the 285 respondents from Path/Bio are not identified as pathologists; this is 6.7% of the total Path/Bio membership. Thus, by extrapolation, it might be expected that there are 55 non-pathologist physicians in that section which if added to other section memberships suggests that there are approximately 114 physician members of the Academy (12%) who are neither pathologists nor psychiatrists.

Non-pathologist, non-psychiatrist respondents listed a wide range of "major medical interest, practice or specialty." Board certification in some specialty was claimed by 64% of them.

"Major fields of activity, interest, or occupation in the Forensic Sciences" were identified as medical examiner, 41%; coroner, 9%; pathology (non-M.E., non-coroner), 29%; psychiatry, 12%; and other, 7%.

Respondents from Pathology/Biology and Psychiatry and Behavioral Science apparently devote more full-time activity on a fulltime basis than do members from other sections where part-time activities seem more prevalent. Three-fourths of the members in Path/Bio and Psychiatry, report a work week in excess of 40 hours. About half of the physicians in Path/Bio and Psychiatry report a work week in excess of 50 hours.

Whatever their section of membership, most physicians were satisfied with opportunities for participation and advancement, with scientific and educational content of AAFS programs, and with the collegiality and/or commonality of interest they found their section. Some criticisms and suggestions for improvement were offered.

Only a few respondents indicated dissatisfaction with their section membership or expressed a desire to transfer to a different section, a process for which there seems to be no constitutional provision at present.

There was scant support for formation of a new section comprised of physicians who are neither pathologist nor psychiatrist.

AAFS Membership, Physician's Forensic Interests, Physician Specialists