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Subject: Letter to the Editor re: Career Choice Regret Article and Related Communications
Date: Tuesday, January 29, 2019 1:44:00 PM
Importance: High

To: Howard Bauchner, MD, Editor in Chief, *JAMA* and The JAMA Network

cc: James L. Madara, MD, Executive Vice President, Chief Executive Officer, AMA

To the Editors:

We are writing to respond to the recent publication (Dryrbye, et al, Association of Clinical Specialty With Symptoms of Burnout and Career Choice Regret Among US Resident Physicians, *JAMA*. 2018;320(11):1114-1130), which was subsequently highlighted in the December 27 electronic AMA Specialty Profile feature by Sara Berg. We are particularly concerned about the bullet-pointed feature by Ms. Berg, calling out pathology as the field with the most career choice regret (<https://www.ama-assn.org/residents-students/specialty-profiles/residents-these-medical-specialties-have-most-regrets>; without the additional data in the full manuscript, this may inappropriately influence students making key career decisions.

“This study is a prospective observational study to examine changes in trainee’s well-being, experiences and attitudes from medical school to residency” to quote from the *JAMA* publication, which is an important paper, with significant implications for GME. This article reveals what appears to be a high level of career regret among pathology residents, despite the lack of a corresponding issue with burnout. However, of the 3588 study subjects, only 49 were in pathology programs—this represents approximately 16% of US-trained pathology PGY 2 trainees and fewer than 9% of pathology PGY2 trainees overall. Of these 49, 32.7% (16) reported career choice regret, but only 12.2% (6) reported specialty choice regret (equivalent to 1% of pathology PGY2 trainees).

We find these data concerning, and in striking contrast to our own observations, experiences and data regarding pathology as a career choice. Numerous publications indicate overall satisfaction with career choice, compensation and other factors (Pathology: A Satisfying Medical Profession, Huihong Xu MD, Daniel G. Remick, MD, *Academic Pathology*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2374289516661559>; *Medscape* 2019, <https://www.medscape.com/slideshow/2019-lifestyle-burnout-depression-6011056>).

This month, the College of American Pathologists administered an online survey of pathology trainees, fellows and practicing pathologists to gather data on career regret and subspecialty choice satisfaction. Of the 201 respondents, 100 were trainees, and the vast majority were satisfied with both their choice of medicine as a career and pathology as a subspecialty. Only 15% of trainees expressed career (medicine overall) regret, and only 3% regretted their choice of pathology as a subspecialty. Specifically corresponding to the PGY2 responses reported in the *JAMA* article, none of 33 PGY2 residents regretted their decision to pursue a career in pathology.

Our concern is the portrayal of this data out of context (as is done in the synopsis by Berg)

and the manner in which it may be casually interpreted. Sixteen dissatisfied PGY2 trainees does not indicate a meaningful trend without a deeper dive and more data. Residency training in any field can be stressful, but students considering a career in pathology should be reassured that pathology is a satisfying career.

We ask JAMA to help correct this potentially misleading information by correcting or retracting the Specialty Profile feature, and publishing our letter. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Barbara S. Ducatman, MD
President
Association of Pathology Chairs

R. Bruce Williams, MD
President
College of American Pathologists