

Career Satisfaction and Burnout in the Reconstructive Microsurgeon

Phuong D. Nguyen MD, Fernando A. Herrera M.D., Andrew L. Da Lio M.D., Christopher A. Crisera M.D., Jaco H. Festekjian M.D.

Purpose: To determine motivating factors, practice patterns and career longevity of surgeons who perform microvascular free flaps (MVFF). To identify modifiable risk factors to reduce MVFF surgeon burnout.

Methods: A cross-sectional observational study was performed using a web-based survey sent to members of the American Society of Reconstructive Microsurgery (ASRM). The survey evaluated demographic variables, practice characteristics, and career satisfaction. Career motivating/demotivating factors were graded from none, mild, moderate, to highly significant.

Results: 101 of 412 surveys sent to microsurgeons were completed (24.5%). Sixty-four percent of respondents underwent microsurgery fellowship training. Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents performed >25 flaps/year. Free flaps performed included breast (63.8% of respondents), head and neck (54.3%), chest/trunk/abdominal (33.0%), extremity (77.7%), and vaginal/perineal (19.1%) reconstruction. The greatest significant stressor was reimbursement (23.4%), with moderate stress from lack of time for personal development (44.1%), excessive workload (39.8%), and invasion of family relationships (39.4%). The most significant motivating factors for performing MVFFs were personal gratification from work (66.0%) and patient gratitude (53.8%). The most significant demotivating factor for MVFFs was amount of work to reimbursement ratio (31.2%). Fifty-six percent of microsurgeons expected their microsurgical volume to stay the same, while 24.5% predicted a decrease and 19.1% predicted an increase in the next 5 years. Ninety-five percent said they would pursue microsurgery again as a field of practice.

Conclusions: Recent literature has demonstrated an increasing level of surgeon dissatisfaction and burnout, particularly amongst those performing microsurgical reconstruction. In contrast, this study demonstrates high career satisfaction amongst reconstructive microsurgeons. However, there remain significant stressors that may decrease motivation for performing MVFFs; of these, work to reimbursement ratio was the most significant stressor and demotivating factor.

References:

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