Impact of Program Support on Faculty Job Stress and Retention

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Introduction

- There is a nationwide shortage of experienced PA faculty, worsened by fast growth in number of programs
  - 89.6% of programs actively seeking to hire (2016/17 Program Report)
  - “Lack of qualified candidates” = most common barrier to hiring new faculty

- Frustrated early-career educators often choose to return to clinical practice
  - 70.6% report that their immediate previous employment was pure clinical (only 19.2% had previous experience in PA or non-PA education)*
  - 41.5% report having considered leaving academia in the last 2 years
  - 45.4% report receiving at least one firm job offer elsewhere*

*Statistics from: Physician Assistant Education Association, By the Numbers: Faculty Report 3: Data from the 2017 Faculty & Directors Survey. Washington, DC: PAEA; 2018
Project Goals

- Explore stressors impacting junior PA Educators, with a focus on the promotions process in academic settings.
- Evaluate existing evidence about whether program support during the transition to academia has the potential to alleviate stressors and increase faculty retention.
Secondary analysis of existing data source: PAEA’s 2017 Faculty & Directors’ Survey

- Online survey initiated in March 2017, sent to all 226 member programs with 89.4% program-level response rate
- Individual response rate ~60.3%, N = 1114 (1109 useable responses)

Variables requested included:
- Gender
- Stress from promotion process (none / somewhat / extensive)
- Perception of “enough” program support & resources for transition to academia (completely untrue to completely true)
- Consideration of leaving academia or changing institutions over the last 2 years (yes / no)

Provision of these data does not necessarily constitute an endorsement of the findings of this research report by the Physician Assistant Education Association.
Faculty Characteristics

- Gender – 34% male / 65% female
  - Shift from 2010, when 42% were male

- Age & length of time in PA Education – Unknown
  - Items were not included in the 2017 faculty & program directors’ survey (but may be added back in 2019)

- Highest degree held – 29.3% doctoral, 63.5% Master’s (relatively stable since 2010)

- Academic rank
  - 7.6% full professor (10.2% in 2010)
  - 22% associate professor (27.5% in 2010)
  - remaining ~70% are mostly at assistant professor or lecturer/instructor rank
Are PA Faculty stressed by academia?

*Figure 7. How stressful was your transition from clinical work to academia? (5 pt. scale)

- About 65% report the transition to academia was somewhat to extremely stressful.
- 45.5% reported research & publishing demands were a source of stress in the past 2 years.
- 53.6% report that the promotions process was a source of stress in the past two years.

*Figure excerpted directly from: Physician Assistant Education Association, By the Numbers: Faculty Report 3: Data from the 2017 Faculty & Directors Survey. Washington, DC: PAEA; 2018
Women more likely to report stress from the promotion process (56.8% vs. 47.8%), \( p = .008 \), Fisher’s Exact test

No difference in having considered leaving current institution

Women are more likely to consider leaving academia entirely (44.8% vs 34.9%), \( p = .002 \), Fisher’s Exact test
Do PA faculty feel supported?

"My program provided enough support and resources to help me transition from clinical work to academia."

About a third of those who answered the question (32.2%) did not feel well supported in their transition to academia.
Does program support help?

During the past two years have you considered leaving your current institution for another?

"My program provided enough support and resources to help me transition from clinical work to academia."
Does program support help?

During the past two years have you considered leaving academia for another job?

- Completely untrue: 34.78% No, 65.22% Yes
- Somewhat untrue: 35.94% No, 64.06% Yes
- Neither true nor untrue: 59.21% No, 40.79% Yes
- Somewhat true: 54.30% No, 45.70% Yes
- Completely true: 76.11% No, 23.89% Yes

"My program provided enough support and resources to help me transition from clinical work to academia."
Conclusions & Discussion

- PA faculty mainly enter academia from clinical settings. The transition is stressful for most.

- PA faculty who perceive that they were strongly supported during their transition into academia are less likely to report considering leaving their home institutions or leaving academia altogether.

- Supporting junior faculty appears to be a good investment of program & institutional resources

- Examples of such support might include formal mentoring programs, travel for faculty development workshops, and guaranteed set-aside time for scholarship.
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References

- Physician Assistant Education Association, By the Numbers: Faculty Report 3: Data from the 2017 Faculty & Directors Survey. Washington, DC: PAEA; 2018. doi:10.17538/FR3.2018


