Colon and rectal surgery deals with diagnosing and treating diseases of the intestinal tract, colon, rectum, anal canal, and perianal area. The specialty was known as proctology until 1961, when the name was changed to better reflect the specialty’s focus. In addition to having proficiency in the field of general surgery, a colon and rectal surgeon is trained in the medical and surgical treatment of conditions such as colon and rectal cancer, polyps, inflammatory bowel disease, diverticulitis, as well as anal conditions such as hemorrhoids, fissures, abscesses, and fistulas. Training also provides the specialist with in-depth knowledge of intestinal and anorectal physiology required for the treatment of problems such as constipation and incontinence.

Practitioners treat all age groups, but most of their patients are middle-aged and elderly. Their work typically involves a mix of techniques such as endoscopy and colonoscopy. New technology has made minimally invasive colon and rectal surgery possible, as well as improving diagnosis and treatment of inflammatory bowel disease, Crohn’s disease, colon cancer, and other patient problems.
Profile
The following information reflects responses from 36 colon/rectal surgeons who completed the 2003 Pathway Physician's Survey.

A. Respondents by types of areas
- Rural: 5.56%
- Small City: 30.56%
- Metropolitan City: 47.22%
- Large City: 16.67%

B. Respondents by gender
- Female: 17.14%
- Male: 82.86%

C. Respondents by years in practice

Perspectives
A. Respondents’ satisfaction with current specialty/area of work
B. Would you choose this specialty again?

Not Sure 5.56%
No 8.33%
Yes 86.11%

C. Respondents by practice environment

D. Respondents' satisfaction with practice environment
Rating and Weighting of Critical Factors

Critical Factors represent significant aspects of physicians’ experiences in their practices. The rating represents their assessment of their current practice characteristics, while the weighting represents the importance of each factor to physicians.

A. Caring for patients: How much time do you spend directly seeing and caring for patients?

Rating

\[ \sigma = 1.52 \]

Weighting

\[ \sigma = 0.47 \]

B. Continuity of care: How much continuity of care do you have with patients, (i.e., the length of patient relationships)?

Rating

\[ \sigma = 1.90 \]

Weighting

\[ \sigma = 0.68 \]

C. Autonomy: To what extent do you have the final word on the treatment of your patients?

Rating

\[ \sigma = 1.68 \]

Weighting

\[ \sigma = 0.73 \]
D. **Diversity**: How much routine (similar work) or diversity (different tasks/activities) is involved in your work?

![Diversity Rating and Weighting Diagram](image)

\[ \sigma = 1.92 \]

E. **Personal time**: Does your work allow you to control the scheduling and amount of time you spend on personal activities, (i.e., family, leisure)?

![Personal Time Rating and Weighting Diagram](image)

\[ \sigma = 2.36 \]

F. **Expertise**: How broad is the scope of your work?

![Expertise Rating and Weighting Diagram](image)

\[ \sigma = 2.53 \]
G. Income satisfaction: Compared to all physicians, do you feel you are fairly compensated for the amount of time and effort you spend?

- **Rating**: 5.3
  - **σ**: 2.63

- **Weighting**: 3.9
  - **σ**: 0.89

H. Creativity: To what extent does your work provide opportunity for creativity?

- **Rating**: 6.1
  - **σ**: 2.07

- **Weighting**: 3.6
  - **σ**: 0.96

I. Certainty of outcomes: How much certainty of clinical outcomes does your work provide?

- **Rating**: 7.8
  - **σ**: 1.06

- **Weighting**: 3.8
  - **σ**: 0.88
J. Clinical decision-making: On what basis are your clinical decisions made?

**Rating**

- Application of theory to a situation
- Based on prior evidence of clinical outcomes

**Weighting**

- Not at all important
- Very important

K. Patient decision-making: To what extent do your patients have input into decisions about their health care?

**Rating**

- Little opportunity
- Great deal of opportunity

**Weighting**

- Not at all important
- Very important

L. Interacting with other physicians/members of health-care team: To what extent does your work provide opportunities for you to interact with other physicians/ members of a health-care team?

**Rating**

- Very little
- A great deal

**Weighting**

- Not at all important
- Very important
M. Manual/mechanical activities: How often do you use manual/mechanical activities for highly skilled tasks (i.e., following procedures, performing operations)?

N. Pressure: How much pressure do you have in your work (i.e., dealing with clinical crises, need for immediate decisions about patients, dealing with multiple patients simultaneously).

O. Responsibility: How much responsibility do you assume for patient outcomes in your work?
P. Schedule: What type of schedule do you have in your work?

Q. Security: How much professional security do you have in your position, (i.e., know where you stand and are certain of your future professionally, will there be a need for your services in the future)?

R. Sense of accomplishment: To what extent does your work provide the opportunity to see end results?
Weekly distribution of time
According to the survey, colon/rectal surgeons spend their week as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Average Hours per week (may overlap)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patient care activities</td>
<td>47.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-call(in contact)</td>
<td>10.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-call(available)</td>
<td>77.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>7.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional travel</td>
<td>5.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing education</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community service</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>4.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other professional</td>
<td>5.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Patient profile
A. Patient encounters per week

![Bar chart showing the number of patients in different types of encounters: Ambulatory, Inpatient, Nursing Home, Telephone, Terminally Ill, Other Encounters.]

B. Patient characteristics
By age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infants(0-2 yrs)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children(3-18 yrs)</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults(19-64 yrs)</td>
<td>62.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older adults(65+ yrs)</td>
<td>35.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of patient encounters that deal with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Routine check-ups</td>
<td>17.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acute illness</td>
<td>44.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic illness</td>
<td>31.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminal illness</td>
<td>6.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race Type</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underrepresented minority (URM)</td>
<td>23.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-URM</td>
<td>76.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of time per patient encounter devoted to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acute conditions</td>
<td>56.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic conditions</td>
<td>31.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventive health</td>
<td>18.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By type of insurance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Insurance</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medicaid/Medicare</td>
<td>41.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uninsured</td>
<td>10.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>47.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Five types of illnesses/conditions most frequently encountered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colon cancer</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anorectal problem</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemorrhoids</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflammatory bowel disease</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gall bladder disease</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Specialty: Colon and Rectal Surgery
Total survey responses: 36

Summary of comments for question: List up to three other factors, if any, you would advise students to consider carefully before selecting your specialty?
Physicians who completed the Pathway Physician’s Survey, 2003, submitted the following comments. The majority of comments are categorized by the Critical Factors that are rated and weighted in another section. Numbers in parentheses indicate the total number of responses for a particular comment.

1. Caring for Patients
   • Dedication to patient care

2. Continuity of Care

3. Autonomy
   • Independence

4. Diversity
   • Diversity of care

5. Personal Time
   • Personal time/flexibility/control (3)
   • Quality of life (2)
   • Personal life

6. Expertise
   • Narrow area of specialty
   • Wonderful spectrum of pathology and therapy

7. Income Satisfaction
   • Very reasonable income (2)
   • Intrusion of financial considerations
   • Willingness to earn substantially less than people with much less intelligence and talent-work must be its own reward
   • Potential return

8. Creativity

9. Certainty of Outcomes

10. Clinical Decision Making
    • Be able to make decisions in a void of information

11. Patient Decision Making
12. Interacting with Other Physicians/Members of Health-care Team

13. Manual /Mechanical Activities
   - Like to do endoscopic procedures

14. Pressure
   - Stress level

15. Responsibility
   - Ability to accept responsibility (2)

16. Schedule
   - Predictable hours
   - Time requirements/commitment (6)

17. Security
   - Job availability

18. Sense of Accomplishment

19. Patient Characteristics
   - Lack of emergent patients

20. Types of Illnesses

21. Practice Environment
   - Type of practice
   - Geographic desires/location of practice (3)
   - Academic vs. private practice
   - Medico-legal ramifications
   - If you find a good working environment with great colleagues there is a lot of satisfaction in the practice of surgery
   - Enjoy a mix of office and hospital-based practice

22. Health Care Environment
   - Political atmosphere of medicine
   - Dealing with medical administration

23. Personality/Temperament
   - Like intestinal surgery
   - Surgical ability
   - Dexterity
   - Willingness to work in an area of the body deemed unpleasant
• Willingness to work hard
• Patience
• Curiosity

24. Miscellaneous Comments
• Opportunities to train in research (3)
• What do you want to be doing 10 years from now?
• The training is tough/long training (6)
• You will give a lot of your life to surgery so you really must enjoy it a lot more than the other medical specialties to be happy
• Desire for a surgical career
• Experience with colorectal surgeon
• Unbridled interest
• Try to visit physicians in your interested practice to see what they do.
• Good quality of life possible
• Your marriage
• Specific focus
• Patient satisfaction
• Collegiality of specialty
• Satisfaction (3)
• Surgery practice can be hard. However it is rewarding and you learn to diagnose and fix the problem.
• Likely competition for positions
• Good field for women
• Prefer to confine surgery to a limited area