

Plastic Surgeons and their Financial Relationships with the Industry in the era of COVID: Insights from the Physician Payments Sunshine Act

Charalampos Siotos, MD, Jennifer Ferraro, MBA, MD, Sydney R. Horen, BA, Kalliopi Siotou, DDS, Joseph Lopez, MD, MBA, Amir H. Dorafshar, MD, FACS
Division of Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery, Departments of Surgery, Rush University Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois

Introduction

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on physician relationships with industry, and subsequent financial implications has not been previously assessed. The aim of this study is to compare pre- and post-COVID-19 payments between industry and medical providers for all plastic surgeons.

Methods

- Payment information was collected for the years 2019 and 2020 from OPP



- An analysis was performed of trends and comparison of payments for each year for all plastic surgeons and each subspecialty cohort

Results

- Industry payments between 2019 and 2020 decreased by 30.5%

	Financial year 2019	Financial year 2020
Number of physicians included	6,437	5,076
Number of unique payments	72,044	29,946
Total amount of payments (in US dollars)	47,929,752.87	33,319,238.14
Average total amount and SD (per unique physician, in US dollars)	7,551.56 (261,995.59)	6,564.07 (269,048.91)
Median total amount and IQR (per unique physician, in US dollars)	295.33 (100.38-1,164.55)	133.43 (42.52-367.99)

SD—standard deviation, IQR—interquartile range

- Most affected general plastic and reconstructive surgery (-56%), least affected craniofacial surgery (-9%)

Subspecialty	Relative differences	p-value*
Facial Plastic Surgery	-46.23	<0.0001
Plastic Surgery	-44.38	<0.0001
Plastic Surgery Within the Head and Neck	-9.40	0.3513
Surgery of the Hand	-33.09	0.0005
Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery	-55.85	<0.0001

*p-value generated from Mann Whitney U test.

- Total charitable contributions and grant payments increased by 61% and 273%, respectively

Category	Relative difference	p-value
Charitable Contribution	61.39	0.402
Compensation for services other than consulting, including serving as faculty or as a speaker at a venue other than a continuing education program	-68.36	0.0322
Compensation for serving as faculty or as a speaker for a non-accredited and noncertified continuing education program	-48.41	0.2675
Compensation for serving as faculty or as a speaker for an accredited or certified continuing education program	-61.25	<0.0001
Consulting Fee	-34.70	<0.0001
Current or prospective ownership or investment interest	-3.11	Not estimable
Education	-30.60	0.9557
Entertainment	-64.71	0.0033
Food and Beverage	-57.34	<0.0001
Gift	-89.18	<0.0001
Grant	272.56	0.2909
Honoraria	-15.86	<0.0001
Royalty or License	-7.13	0.8599
Travel and Lodging	-83.19	<0.0001

Conclusion

Analysis of industry-physician payments available through the Sunshine Act shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted industry payments to plastic surgery and its subspecialties.