

Quantifying the Costs of Academic Engagement in Plastic Surgery: A Comprehensive Analysis

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Background

- Academic engagement plays a central role in education and career advancement in Plastic Surgery
- While other surgical specialties have evaluated the financial barriers to such involvement, plastic surgery lacks a comprehensive cost analysis.
- This study seeks to quantify the cumulative costs associated with academic participation across societies, meetings, and publishing platforms to establish benchmarks for the specialty.

Methods

- National, regional, and subspecialty-specific plastic surgery societies, meetings, and journals were identified.
- Baseline academic engagement (BAE): board certification cost + membership in two societies + adjusted conference attendance (ACA) fees for two conferences.
- Adjusted conference attendance (ACA) costs include: travel, accommodations, and time off work
- BAE and annual costs were extrapolated to lifetime costs of academic engagement, assuming a 34-year career.
- Costs were reported as median(range).
- Costs-per-CME credit and descriptive statistics were used to summarize costs across categories and subspecialties.

Results

- A total of 44 societies and their conferences were identified: 23 national/regional societies, two microsurgical, two aesthetic, three hand, four craniofacial, two transgender, and two identity groups.
- Median annual society membership was \$300(\$100-\$1,475).
- Conference attendance costs were \$876(\$0-\$1,675) and \$1051(\$300-\$2,350) for plastic surgeon members and nonmembers (Figure 1).
- Conference registration for medical students and residents was \$315(\$0-\$100) and \$308(\$50-\$920).
- Society membership and conference costs were highest in the Aesthetic subspecialty.

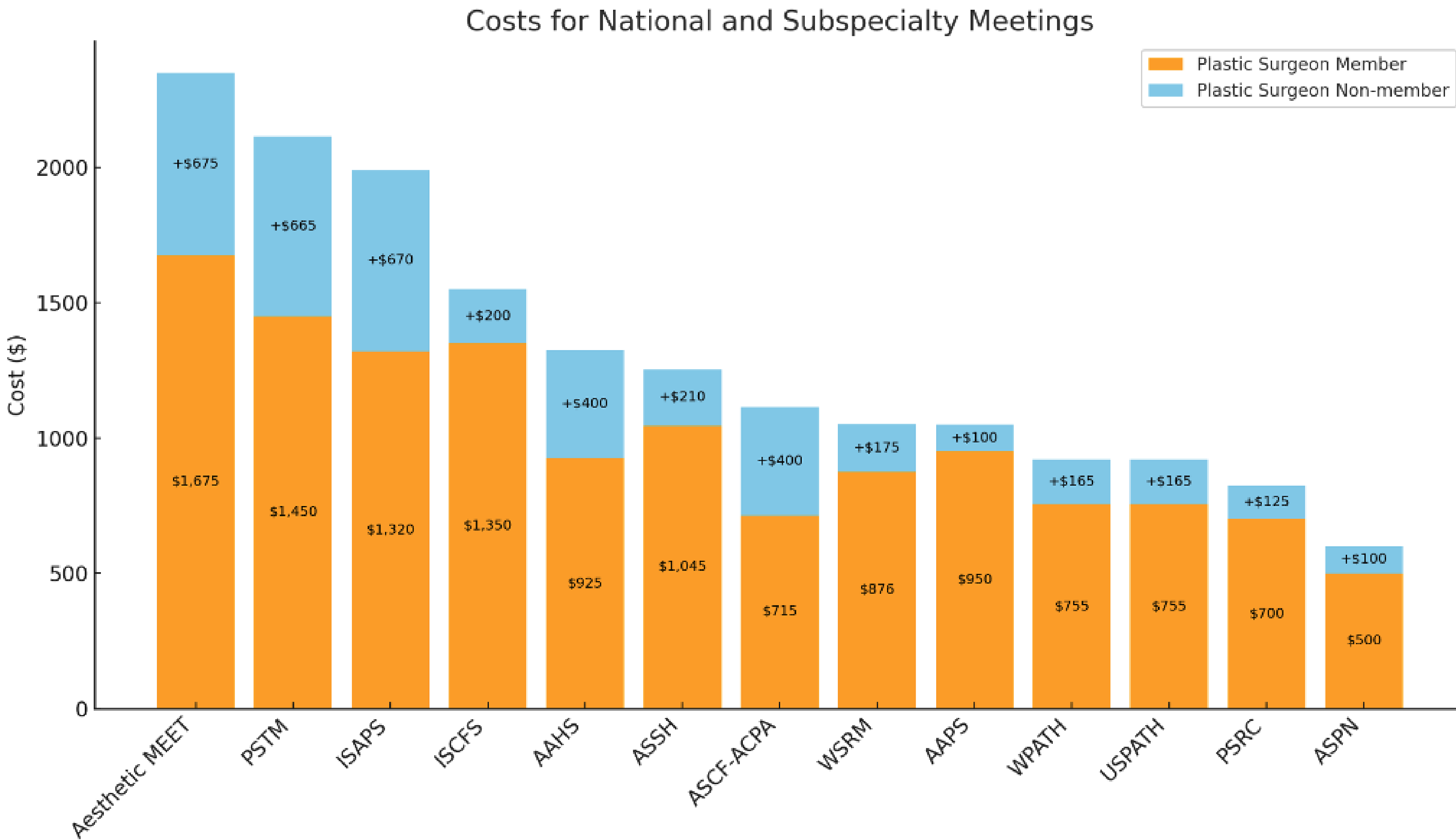


Figure 1: Costs of Meeting Attendance for National and Subspecialty Meetings in Plastic Surgery

- Cost-per-CME averaged \$47.20 per credit for members and \$55.71 for nonmembers
- Cost-per-CME was higher at regional than national conferences.
- 21 total journals were identified with subscription costs of \$464(\$0-\$2,002)
- Open access publishing fees were \$3,650(\$700-\$5,334)
- Journal subscription prices and open access fees were highest in the Craniofacial and Aesthetic subspecialties, respectively
- The average BAE was \$21,280.72, with an annual continuation cost of \$17,090.12
- Over a surgeon's career, the total estimated cost of academic engagement was \$585,254.68 (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Baseline Academic Engagement and Lifetime Academic Engagement Costs	
Requirement	Cost
<u>Initial Board Certification Fee</u>	\$5,443.60
<u>Adjusted Conference Attendance Fee*</u>	\$8,907.97
Average Conference Cost	\$1,530.83
Average Travel Cost	\$395.52
Average Time off Work Cost	\$6,025.95
Average Hotel Cost	\$955.67
<u>Baseline Academic Engagement**</u>	\$21,280.72
General Society Membership Fee (ASPS)	\$456.00‡
General Society Membership Fee (PSRC)	\$275.00
Adjusted Conference Attendance Fee (ASPS)	\$7,928.06
Adjusted Conference Attendance Fee (PSRC)	\$7,178.06
Initial Board Certification Fee	\$5,443.60
<u>Annual Baseline Academic Engagement**</u>	\$17,090.12
General Society Membership Fee (ASPS)	\$1,299.00
General Society Membership Fee (PSRC)	\$275.00
Adjusted Conference Attendance Fee (ASPS)	\$7,928.06
Adjusted Conference Attendance Fee (PSRC)	\$7,178.06
Annual Continuous Board Certification Fee	\$410.00
<u>Lifetime Cost†</u>	\$585,254.68

Discussion

- The financial investment associated with academic engagement in Plastic Surgery exceeds half a million dollars across a surgeon's career.
- This disproportionately burdens early-career, international, and private practice surgeons without institutional backing.
- Costs of meeting attendance also pose a barrier for disadvantaged medical students and residents and inhibit their career development.
- Expanding virtual CME options, increasing scholarship availability, and providing decreased rates for low- and middle-income countries may help reduce disparities and ensure broader, sustained involvement in academic plastic surgery.

