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Academic Chairpersons in Academic Medicine & Flexible Career Policies

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A 2012 survey of faculty in academic medicine collected information about their perceptions of climate and support for the use of flexible career policies and programs. Over 23,000 medical school faculty were eligible to participate, and after data cleaning, 8,096 responses were accepted for inclusion in the final database. The overall response rate was 35% (Min=8.3%, Max=57.5%, SD=13.04). Twenty-four items on the Faculty Survey addressed clinical sites and medical schools support provided by the faculty to manage work and personal or family responsibilities. The survey items used a Likert scale, with most responses ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”, or “To a Great Extent” to “Not at All”. Crosstabs were used to find statistically significant results in terms of gender and parental status using Pearson’s χ^2 test.

Overall, both men and women, and parents and non-parents, found their faculty colleagues to be the most useful individual to help them with support and guidance on flexibility issues and their career goals. Both men and women found their department chair to provide the most useful support and guidance when asked about their department chair, division chief, medical school administrators, human resources, and clinical site administrators. Faculty Affairs offices were the least helpful among both men and women, although women were more likely to find the faculty affairs office useful than men. At medical schools, men were more likely than women to perceive useful support and guidance from the department chair, division chief, medical school administrators, human resources, and clinical site administrators. Specifically, men higher proportions indicated having had useful support and guidance from department chair/head than women did (31.0% and 24.4%, respectively for “To a Great Extent”, $p < .001$).

Non-parents were more likely to feel supported by their department head, (e.g., clinical or administrative duties could be reassigned when a work-family conflict arose) than non-parents. Specifically, non-parents has higher proportions indicating having had useful support and

guidance from department chair/head than parents did (30.3% and 26.3%, respectively for “To a Great Extent”, $p < .001$). Implications for department chairs who are interested in creating and sustaining career flexibility in their academic departments will be discussed.