

THE PLACE OF NEUROLOGY IN SLEEP MEDICINE

Introduction: Several years have passed since sleep medicine was approved as a subspecialty under the auspices of the American Council on Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) and the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). This seems an appropriate time to review the demographics of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) membership with the goal of analyzing the place of neurology within the society. This would have been an easy task had there been statistics on specialties of the AASM members which would be available to surveyors. However, we were informed that no data on this subject has been compiled by the organization nor was any help available to ferret out this information. Therefore, we used the AASM directory to ascertain all members who were neurologists judging either from their addresses (names of neurological groups, for instance) or from their email addresses. For those individuals whose specialty could not be determined from the above information, we searched the American Academy of Neurology (AAN) directory to determine whether the individual was a member or not with the assumption that all neurologists would indeed belong to the AAN. The 2007-2008 editions of the directories were used.

Results: The AASM had 6222 total number of members of all types (MD, PhD, dentists and oral surgeons (DMD, etc), absence of degree, etc). Four thousand six hundred seventeen (4617) were MDs (74% of the total) and 26% were non-MDs. There were 938 neurologists (using the methods delineated above) which was 15.2% of the total but the 4617 MDs, neurologists consisted of 20.3% (probably a more relevant statistic than percent of the entire membership). Although we had no way to accurately determine the specialties of the remaining MDs, a rough estimate can be made from the information given for each member. It appears that pulmonary specialists were about 50-55% of the total membership and approximately 70-75% of the MDs (a ratio to neurologists of ~3.5:1).

As a secondary outcome, the total number of individual members in each state and the number of sleep labs in each state were derived. For individual members, the top 5 states were as follows: California (403), Texas (331), New York (293), Florida (290), and Ohio (236). Comparable data for sleep labs were as follows: Ohio (64), Pennsylvania (42), California (41), Alabama (40), and Illinois (37).

Discussion: Judging from an informal and not precise estimate of neurologists in the AASM conducted a few years ago, our specialty has held its own in recent years although we remain way below the number of pulmonologists. It is difficult to know whether we should consider the data as "good news, bad news, or no news" (a refrain from a popular weekend program on National Public Radio (NPR)). It would be interesting to compare the present data with previous directories to ascertain the actual (not estimated) rate of change (if any) in the percent of neurologists. We should also note that of the 23 presidents of the AASM and its predecessor the American Sleep Disorders Association (ASDA), 6 (26.1%) were neurologists (Drs Sassin, Mahowald, Fry, Kader, Chesson, and Silber).