

## Female hospital consultants are '20% less productive than their male colleagues'

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Female consultants working in the NHS are responsible for fewer patient episodes each year than their male counterparts, according to new research published in the current issue of the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine.

Researchers from the Universities of York and Birmingham highlighted a 20% difference in the number of episodes conducted between male and female consultants. Researchers logged the inpatient workloads of 7236 male and 1048 female consultants across 10 of the most common medical specialties and found differences in activity across ten of the most common surgical and medical areas including general surgery, trauma and orthopaedics, gastroenterology, cardiology and paediatrics.

On average, male consultants completed 160 more episodes of care each year than their female colleagues.

Professor Nick Freemantle from the University of Birmingham's Department of Primary Care commented, "The difference in activity between male and female consultants was striking and changed little between different medical specialties. Studies in the US and Canada have shown similar results, but in those systems doctors are paid by fees-for-service, so lower activity rates may represent a personal choice. "It's harder to know why this difference should exist in the NHS, but it's a substantial and statistically significant difference across a wide range of medical areas."

Dr Karen Bloor from the University of York commented, "There is a considerable need for more work to identify why these differences in activity appear to exist. Whatever the cause, this is something the NHS needs to tackle and to take into account when planning services. The potential impact on efficiency and on patient care is enormous - particularly as more women than ever are entering the medical profession."

The researchers used official NHS data to chart the activity of individual consultants. Hospital Episode Statistics data contains details of all admissions to NHS hospitals in England, and was linked with more general information about consultants' age, gender and area of work.

The authors pointed out that HES data doesn't measure every aspect of consultants' work. "It does not quantify information about teaching and administration where women may be more heavily involved." said Dr Karen Bloor. "Or the difference might reflect female consultants taking more time with individual patients."

Dr Kamran Abbasi, editor JRSM, added: "These data do not show that men are better doctors than women. They do, however, highlight potential differences in the way medical careers develop for men and women in our health service. It will be fascinating to explore the underlying reasons for this difference in productivity. Does it mean less is more?"

### ENDS

Gender and variation in activity rates of hospital consultants: Bloor K, Freemantle N, Maynard A. is published in the January issue of the Journal of the Royal Medical Society, volume 101.

All authors and Kamran Abbasi are available for comment. Please contact the relevant press officer.

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