

An Open Letter to ASA and AUA Members

October 2024

Sexual Harassment in Academic Medicine: A Pervasive Issue Across All Medical Specialties

We read with interest the AAMC's "State of Women in Academic Medicine 2023-2024" report,¹ highlighting significant progress and ongoing challenges in gender equity within academic medicine. Key findings in anesthesiology include the following:

- Increased proportion of women chairs of academic anesthesiology departments from 13% in 2004 to 18% in 2024.
- Narrow (but present) compensation gap between men and women in our specialty, with women making \$0.94 on the dollar compared to men
- Persistent presence of gender harassment within anesthesiology, with 1 in 2 women and 1 in 4 men experiencing a form of sexual harassment in the past 12 months.

The high prevalence of sexual harassment in our specialty is concerning. Unfortunately, this report is not an outlier. Previous AAMC reports (2010 and 2022) showed similar trends for gender harassment in anesthesiology. The AAMC report underscores the need for comprehensive, specialty-wide efforts to combat sexual harassment. We also interpret these findings as recognition of a pervasive issue across all medical specialties. Hence, we affirm that finding approximately 1 in 3 of all female faculty and 1 in 10 of all male faculty reported sexual harassment is unsatisfactory.

As presidents of anesthesiology societies, representing ASA and AUA, we emphasize the imperative of creating a civil, safe, and inclusive workplace for all. As leaders in our field, we understand the importance of setting the tone and leading by example. Any form of harassment, including sexual harassment, must be condemned and eradicated. The commitment extends to elucidating the various factors that have allowed and continue to allow this problem to persist. We also are eager to partner with others to find effective and sustainable solutions to this pervasive issue.

We look forward to continued discussions on this important topic. We call upon other specialty societies to share their data on sexual harassment prevalence among their members and to join us in our efforts. Only through current and systematic data collection and a unified approach can we develop effective strategies to eliminate harassment and sustain a supportive environment for everyone in medicine.

Sincerely,

Ronald L. Harter, MD, FASA
President
American Society of Anesthesiologists

Dolores B. Njoku, MD
President
Association of University Anesthesiologists

Reference:

Lautenberger DM, Dandar VM. The State of Women in Academic Medicine 2023-2024: Progressing Toward Equity. Washington, DC: AAMC; 2024.