

Re-assessing Physical Disability among US Medical Students

D. L. Moutsiakis, MD, MPH and Thomas Polisoto, MD

In two prior studies that assessed the proportion of graduating medical students with physical disabilities (MSPD), the proportion of graduating MSPD was found to be 0.23% (Moore-West M 1982) in 1980 and 0.19% in 1990 (Wu SSH 1996). The current study sought to learn what changes have since occurred regarding the graduation of MSPD. A questionnaire was sent to the deans of student affairs at all accredited medical schools in the United States (n=123) in attempts to determine: (1) the proportion of medical students with physical disabilities (MSPD) who graduated during the years 2002-2005, and (2) the onset of disabilities, either before or after admission to medical school. Current results indicate that the proportion of graduating MSPD among responding medical schools was 0.15% in 2005, thus indicating a downward trend. Furthermore, a significantly lower proportion of graduating MSPD in the current study had pre-existing physical disability before admission to medical school than in the Wu study. (Wu SSH 1996) The size of the graduating class did not significantly impact the proportion of graduating MSPD.