



# The Association of Surgeons of South Africa

affiliated to The South African Medical Association NPC. *Incorporated Association not for gain.*  
Reg No. 05100136108

## Surgery in South Africa: Challenges, barriers and the value of Mentorship

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

It is well recognised that surgery is a demanding career. This is often compounded by a lack of support and mentorship. Recently, there has been increased interest in improving the lives of surgeons by addressing the challenges of, and barriers to a work-life balance. There is also an increased interest amongst female doctors to pursue a surgical career. Female surgeons and female trainees bring unique traits to the traditionally male-dominated field of surgery, but at the same time, experience singular challenges in the workplace.

The intention of this survey is to understand the challenges and barriers that all South African surgeons are currently facing with a view to facilitating surgical training and encouraging mentorship.

### Demographics

#### 1. Gender

- Male
- Female
- Neutral

#### 2. Age (years)

- a) 20 – 29
- b) 30 – 39
- c) 40 – 49
- d) > 50

#### 3. Marital status

- a) Single
- b) Married
- c) Divorced
- d) Other

4. Training/ practice location

- Gauteng   
Limpopo   
Mpumalanga   
Northwest   
KwaZulu-Natal   
Eastern Cape   
Western Cape   
Northern Cape   
Free State

**Work/ training particulars**

5. Position

- Consultant
- Years post-fellowship (FCS):
  - Sub-specialty (if applicable):
- Fellow
- Sub-specialty:
- Registrar
- Year of training:
  - Surgical speciality:
- Medical officer in a surgical specialty
- Years of training:
  - Intend to apply for a registrar post?  Yes  No

6. Post

- a) Full-time public/state employed   
b) Part-time public/state employed   
c) Part-time public/state-employed with RWOP private sessions   
d) Limited private practice   
e) Full-time private with sessions   
  
f) Full-time private practice   
g) Employed abroad   
h) Other (including research fellowships/PhD)   
i. If other, please state what position you currently hold
- 

7. Why did you choose a career in surgery?

- a) Inspired by role model   
b) Technical aspect   
c) Family pressure   
d) Prestige

- e) Allure of acute element of surgery
- f) Academic competitiveness
- g) Other \_\_\_\_\_
- h) Do you regret your choice? Yes  No

8. If you are a qualified surgeon, what have been the benefits of your profession?

### Perceptions

9. What do you perceive as barriers to pursuing a career in surgery?

- Verbal discouragement from pursuing a career in surgery
- Was this discouragement from a male or female colleague?  
Male  Female  Both
  - Was the discouragement based on  
Gender  Age  Family Aspirations
- Surgical work hours and heavy workload
- Limited time:
- for outside interests
  - to date/marry
  - to have a child
  - to spend time with family
- Difficulty taking leaves of absence for sickness, family responsibility, or maternity/paternity leave due to feelings of guilt or weakness
- Access to good postgraduate surgical training programme
- Cost of surgical training
- Lack of "surgical personality"

### Profession-related facts

10. What challenges have you experienced

- Gender Discrimination
- Racial discrimination
- Sexual harassment
- Abuse (physical, sexual, emotional)
- Burnout
- Difficulty finding a work-life balance
- Negative experience with colleagues

- Were these colleagues male or female?  
 Male    Female   Both
- Impersonating male qualities to “toughen up” or put on a thick skin at work
- Not treated equally to male surgeon/trainees on surgical rotation/within your faculty
- Hostile culture towards women surgeons

**Resources**

11. Do you have a role model?

- |                            |       |                          |                        |                          |
|----------------------------|-------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| a) Life in general         | Yes   | <input type="checkbox"/> | No                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) In surgery              | Yes   | <input type="checkbox"/> | No                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) Who is your role model? | Peer  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Senior colleague       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                            | Other | <input type="checkbox"/> | Please elaborate:..... |                          |

12. Mentorship

Mentorship remains an important factor which influences the decision to pursue surgery and to retain surgical staff

- |  |      |                          |        |                          |
|--|------|--------------------------|--------|--------------------------|
| a) Do you have a mentor?                           | Yes  | <input type="checkbox"/> | No     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i. If yes, what gender is your mentor:             | Male | <input type="checkbox"/> | Female | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  | Both | <input type="checkbox"/> |        |                          |
| ii. If yes, how many mentors do you have?          | 1    | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  | >2   | <input type="checkbox"/> |        |                          |
| b) Are you mentoring someone?                      | Yes  | <input type="checkbox"/> | No     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i. If yes, what gender is your mentee:             | Male | <input type="checkbox"/> | Female | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  | Both | <input type="checkbox"/> |        |                          |
| ii. How many mentees?                              | 1    | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  | More | <input type="checkbox"/> |        |                          |
| c) Is it important to have a mentor?               | Yes  | <input type="checkbox"/> | No     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d) Do you feel you lack mentorship?                | Yes  | <input type="checkbox"/> | No     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e) What do you perceive as benefits of mentorship? |      |                          |        |                          |

13. In your opinion, what would facilitate access to surgical training?

- Mentorship programmes
- Postgraduate surgical training scholarships

Part-time surgical training programmes

Other

Please elaborate, if "Other" ticked:

14.

a) Do you think there is a need for a national group to support and mentor surgeons?

Yes

No

Unsure

b) If you are a female respondent, do you think there is a need for a national support group to support specifically women in surgery?

Yes

No

Unsure

15. Any other comments?

Please feel free to write down any further challenges and triumphs you have experience in your surgical career in surgery.

Thank you for your time.