
Descriptive Study of Job Opportunities in the Allergy Field

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To the Editor:

Allergy is a fairly young medical specialty that has been practiced in Spain from 1926 and was officially recognized in 1978 with a specific training program. The Spanish Society of Allergy was constituted in 1948 and has been known as the Spanish Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (SEAIIC) since 1974 [1]. Today, it comprises 1518 associates, 15% of whom are under 35 years old.

Data on junior members' employment status gives a subjective impression of a low supply of jobs, thus diminishing the attraction of allergy for many doctors choosing a specialty. The objective of this letter is to describe the current employment situation of young allergists, their job opportunities after training, the percentage of unemployment, and the percentage who abandon the specialty. Possible strategies can be proposed by SEAIIC to promote the visibility of specialists and initiatives to increase the attractiveness of allergology.

The Young Allergists and Interns Committee (CAJMIR) of the SEAIIC performed a survey among its members from different geographical areas to gather information on specialists trained between 2009 and 2019, taking into account professional situation, unemployment, and abandonment of the specialty. The information on employment situation covered both public and private practice, scholarships, and other situations. No information was requested on quality or job type (eg, full-time, temporary). Descriptive statistics were analyzed using IBM SPSS v. 20 (IBM Corp.).

Of the 591 allergology positions offered by the Ministry of Health between 2009 and 2019, a total of 574 were taken up. Data were obtained from 487 people (85% of the positions). Of these, 72% were women (n=350) and 18% men (n=90), and data for the remaining 10% (n=47) were unknown. In 4.51% of

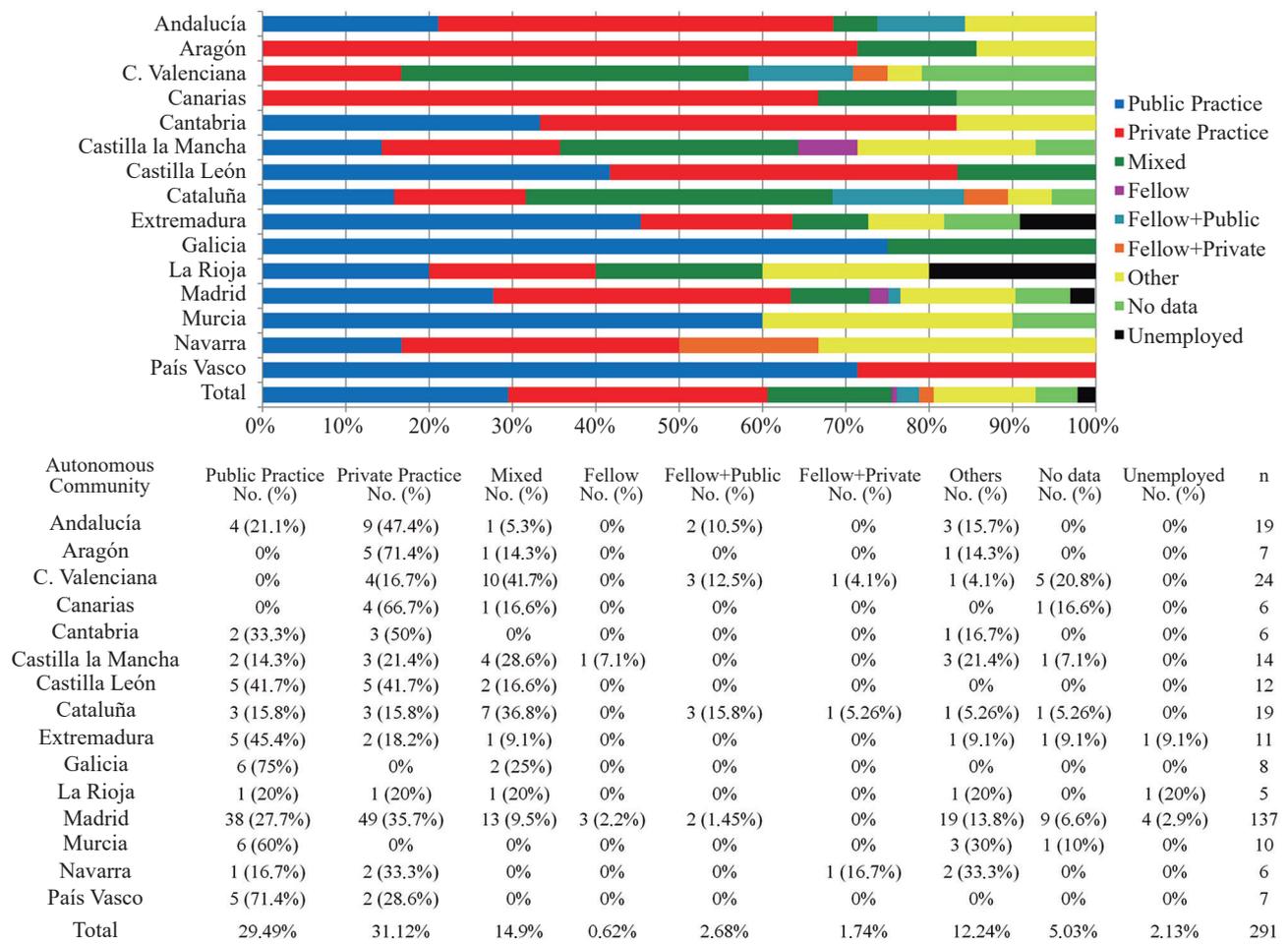


Figure. Professional situation of allergists who completed their training between 2013 and 2019.

cases (n=22), the respondent had a previous specialty, mainly family and community medicine (37%) and pediatrics (18%).

During the period studied, 291 people (60%) obtained the title of specialist, 153 (31%) continued in training, and 43 abandoned the specialty during their residency training (8.8%). A further 30 abandoned the specialty after their training was complete; of these, 13 had chosen a new specialty, 15 were working as general practitioners or in the emergency room, and 2 had returned to their previous specialty.

Of the total number of qualified allergists, 78% (n=226) are currently working as allergy specialists, and 58% (n=131) work in public health (compatible with private practice in 33%). The remaining 42% (n=95) work exclusively in private health care. A research grant was obtained by 5.8% of the specialists (n=17) (4 without simultaneous medical practice). Lastly, 2% (n=6) work in the pharmaceutical industry.

These data show the nationwide percentage of unemployment to be 2% (n=6). However, it was not possible to gather data on the employment situation of 19 specialists. This percentage could vary upwards, increasing to 8.5% if these allergists were unemployed. Likewise, we do not know

the reasons why young specialists leave the specialty, although it seems likely that some did not find a job at the end of their residency.

Aragon, Canarias, and Navarra were the areas with the lowest number of young allergists in public health, followed by Cantabria and Andalucía. On the other hand, Galicia and the Basque Country have a high percentage of young allergists in public health care (100% and 71%). A high percentage of private practice was recorded for Aragon and Canarias, with 86% and 83%, respectively. In the remaining communities, specialists are distributed in a similar way between public and private practice (Figure).

Allergology is currently considered an attractive choice of specialty for residents [2], although it is not as popular as cardiology and dermatology. Interestingly, the high prevalence of allergic diseases [3] has not been met with a substantial increase in the number of places offered for specialists in the public health system, in contrast with the private sector.

Growing demand requires an adequate distribution of allergists. The World Allergy Organization recommends

1 allergist per 50 000 inhabitants [4-5], although this currently varies considerably between autonomous communities. In several communities, private practice represents an alternative for a large number of allergists and for users throughout Spain. In fact, several communities have private allergy units with a wide portfolio of services, comparable to those offered in the public health system.

The type and quality of the contracts have not been analyzed due to their complexity, since each community uses different types of contract.

Similarly, the reasons for leaving the specialty have not been considered, although it seems that young professionals may not find it attractive or are concerned about the lack of employment on completion of training. If a physician decides to leave the specialty owing to concern over future prospects, the number of places in certain areas could be reconsidered or allergists in training (residents) could be relocated to more favorable areas.

Research is an essential requirement for scientific progress, and through SEAIC and public organizations, research opportunities are promoted through scholarships. This alternative has taken on an increasingly prominent role in the medical practice of the allergist and is currently an opportunity for young people with a research profile. However, the percentage is lower than expected, probably because the data were obtained indirectly, thus potentially reflecting lower values than real values. In any case, promoting research as a future opportunity for allergists should be taken into consideration.

In conclusion, there are abundant professional opportunities in allergy, with a relatively low unemployment rate. Public health care welcomes the highest percentage of young specialists, although many allergists also work in the private health system. Bilateral feedback with continued training and research will give greater strength and visibility to the specialty.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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