Objectives

Practice consolidation in healthcare has widespread consequences for both providers and patients. While many studies describe this phenomena in other medical specialties, no such analysis has been performed for neurosurgery specifically. The goal of this study was to assess the trends in the size of US neurosurgery practices in the last five years, 2014-2019.

Methods

Neurosurgery practice characteristics were obtained from the Medicare Physician Compare database for March of 2014 and October of 2019 on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services website. Neurosurgeons were separated based on the size of their practice into seven groups (1-2 members, 3-9 members, 10-24 members, 25-49 members, 50-99 members, 100-499 members, and ≥500 members). Trends in neurosurgery practice sizes were analyzed from 2014 to 2019 to determine temporal changes in group practice size.

Results

Individual neurosurgeons were seen moving from smaller to larger practices. Small 1 to 2 member practices decreased by 7.04%, while large 1000+ member practices grew by 12.99% from 2014 to 2019 (Fig. 1). This trend was seen in every geographical region, though to varying extents (Fig. 2). At the practice size level, there was an overall decrease of 462 unique practices. Most of the decrease is due to the significant loss of smaller practices. 1 to 2 member practices had the largest decrease of 78.52%, while 500-999 member practices had an increase of 41.56% (Fig. 3).

Discussion

There is an increasing trend of physician practice consolidation within medicine, which is likewise true within neurosurgery. This study demonstrates that over the last 5 years there has been a substantial trend in increasing practice sizes, potentially indicating that more neurosurgeons are choosing to work for large healthcare organizations over small practices. The impact of these differences in practice size should be examined to determine large scale effects on patient care, payment models, access, and outcomes along with physician compensation, lifestyle, and satisfaction.

Summary Points

- More neurosurgeons are choosing to practice in larger health networks and academic institutions
- A small snapshot of 5 years displays a strong trend within neurosurgical practice and medicine at large

Disclosure

There were no relevant financial or commercial conflicts of interest.