Over 60 Percent of Gynecologic Oncologists Say They Have Experienced Sexual Harassment

For immediate release
June 3, 2019
Contact
Julianne Lee
571-483-1381
julianne.lee@asco.org

ASCO Perspective
“We know sexual harassment is a widespread societal issue, and it is increasingly recognized that sexual harassment affects many women in medicine – and as this study shows, also some men – both during training as well as in practice. As this study makes clear, we have a responsibility to raise awareness so that sexual harassment and other issues related to gender bias can be addressed at a broader level, with the ultimate goal of making the workplace safer and more equitable for everyone,” said ASCO Expert Merry-Jennifer Markham, MD, FACP.

CHICAGO – A recent survey of U.S.-based physician members of the Society of Gynecologic Oncology found that 64% of respondents experienced sexual harassment in training or practice; among women, the rate was 71% and among men it was 51%. Only 10% reported the incident(s) to officials. In addition, women were more likely than men to respond that gender affected career advancement (34% vs. 10%) and played a role in setting their salary (42% vs. 6%).

The study will be featured in a press briefing today and presented at the 2019 American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Annual Meeting.

“The topic of sexual harassment has been widely discussed in the media as it applies to the movie, music, and sports industries, but conversation in the medical community has largely been limited to personal anecdotes discussed behind closed doors,” said lead study author Marina Stasenko, MD, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York, NY. “Gender disparities have persisted in medicine despite a growing number of female physicians, and through our study we hope to increase awareness and acknowledgment of sexual harassment and gender inequalities within gynecologic oncology, hopefully leading to future interventions to address these disparities.”

About the Study
The study was designed to evaluate perceived gender biases, the prevalence of sexual harassment in training and the workplace, and the impact of gender and harassment on career growth and advancement. It was modeled, in part, on an Association of American Medical Colleges survey on this topic that has been conducted since 2012.

The anonymous survey was sent in October 2018 to all 1,566 U.S.-based Society of Gynecologic Oncology members who were physicians. Of those queried, 402 (26%) replied; 255 replies were from women and 147 were from men.

Key Findings
Some form of sexual harassment during training or practice was experienced by 64% of all respondents: 71% of women and 51% of men. Only 10% reported the incident(s) to officials, 17% of women and 10% of men, although the difference is not statistically significant. The most common reasons for not reporting sexual harassment incident(s) to officials were that respondents thought the incident(s) did not seem important enough (40%) or that nothing would be done about it (37%), and fear of retaliation (34%).

The most frequent forms of sexual harassment experienced by those in training or practice, respectively, were:

- Being subjected to sexist remarks (58/51% of women and 28/24% of men).
- Being denied opportunities for training (26/33% of women and 17/19% of men).
- Unwanted sexual advances (30/23% of women and 27/28% of men).
- Asked to exchange sexual favors for academic positions (4% of women and 2% of men, equally in training and practice).

Additional survey findings included:

- 31% of women and 14% of men said they received lower evaluations or academic positions as a result of harassment.
- 34% of women stated that gender had affected their career advancement, compared with 10% of men.
- 42% of women stated that gender played a role in setting their salary, compared with 6% of men.
- 57% of women perceived a gender pay gap, compared with 9% of men.

Next Steps
Dr. Stasenko noted that she hopes this study leads to a larger conversation about sexual harassment in the medical field and serves as a launch pad for further actions.

This study was funded by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York, NY.

Study at a Glance
Study Focus
Sexual harassment in the field of gynecologic oncology

Study Type
Survey of physicians

Survey Respondents
402

Aspect Surveyed
Rate of sexual harassment

Primary Finding
64% of respondents experienced sexual harassment

Secondary Finding(s)
10% reported the sexual harassment incident(s)

ATTRIBUTION TO THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CLINICAL ONCOLOGY ANNUAL MEETING IS REQUESTED IN ALL COVERAGE.

MEDIA CONTACT:
Julianne Lee
571-483-1381
julianne.lee@asco.org

PATIENT AND CAREGIVER INQUIRIES:
Contact Cancer.Net

About ASCO:

Founded in 1964, the American Society of Clinical Oncology, Inc. (ASCO®) is committed to making a world of difference in cancer care. As the world’s leading organization of its kind, ASCO represents nearly 45,000 oncology professionals who care for people living with cancer. Through research, education, and promotion of the highest-quality patient care, ASCO works to conquer cancer and create a world where cancer is prevented or cured, and every survivor is healthy. ASCO is supported by its affiliate organization, the Conquer Cancer Foundation. Learn more at www.ASCO.org, explore patient education resources at www.Cancer.Net, and follow us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube.