

Health Brief: Coffee-buying habits differ based on medical specialty, position

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- Giesinger K, et al. BMJ. 2015;351:h6446, www.bmj.com/content/351/bmj.h6446.

Nearly all doctors purchased coffee at a hospital cafeteria over the course of a year, and buying habits were significantly associated with medical specialty, years in practice and gender, according to a retrospective study at a teaching hospital in Switzerland.

It is well-known that doctors partake in caffeinated beverages to get them through their long workdays. No studies, however, have looked at whether caffeine dependence differs based on medical specialty or gender.

To answer this burning question, researchers analyzed electronic payment system data on purchases made by doctors at four hospital cafeterias in 2014. Doctors pay with their ID badges, allowing researchers to determine the buyers' profession, medical specialty, position, sex and age. They also analyzed who bought rounds of coffee.

Results showed 84% of doctors (644 of 766) bought at least one cup of java, and 70,772 cups were purchased during the year. Orthopedic surgeons bought the most coffee per person (mean 189 cups) followed by radiologists (177 cups) and general surgeons (167 cups). Anesthetists bought the least amount for an average of 39 cups per person throughout the year.

Males bought significantly more cups than females (mean 129 vs. 87) and nearly three times as many espressos (mean 28 vs. 10).

Furthermore, senior doctors bought an average of 45 more cups of joe than junior doctors during the year as well as more rounds. The authors speculated that senior doctors may drink more brew in an attempt to keep up with younger doctors or simply because they have more time to socialize.

Similarly, orthopedic surgeons may be at the top of the coffee-consuming list in keeping with their "work hard/play hard/drink hard" persona, the authors said, or because they have too much time on their hands. Meanwhile, radiologists may be seeking a break from their dark surroundings.

The authors noted that they did not analyze coffee purchased from vending machines.

"Although these beverages do contain caffeine," they said, "we believe this brew does not merit the name coffee."

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