Deciding on a career path can be challenging for residents, including whether to pursue fellowship training. New AAP research shows that pediatricians are satisfied with their career and overall life, regardless of whether they pursue a subspecialty or practice general pediatrics (Byrne BJ, et al. Pediatrics. 2015;136:672-679, http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/136/4/672).

Studies have identified characteristics of residents who are more likely to choose fellowships and factors that might contribute to their decision, but little is known about what life is like after fellowship.

To fill this knowledge gap, researchers used data from the AAP Pediatrician Life and Career Experience Study (PLACES), which tracks the job paths and lives of early career pediatricians.

Results from pediatricians who are eight to 10 years post-residency highlighted differences in learning characteristics, work environment and work-life balance between pediatricians who pursued a subspecialty (fellowship-trained pediatricians) and those who did not (general pediatricians).

More than one-third (39%) of early career pediatricians pursued a subspecialty. They were more likely than general pediatricians to be male (47% vs. 32%) and white, non-Hispanic (66% vs. 60%).

In addition, fellowship-trained pediatricians were more likely than general pediatricians to communicate routinely with colleagues and have work that provides adequate opportunity to gain new knowledge and skills (see Figure 1). They also were more likely to report an annual income of $150,000 or higher (67% vs. 53%).

General pediatricians were more likely than fellowship-trained to:
- work less than 50 hours per week (77% vs. 39%)
- work in suburban areas (51% vs. 18%)
- spend time in direct patient care (mean 88% of time vs. 68%)

Fellowship-trained are less likely than general pediatricians to:
- have a flexible schedule (54% vs. 64%)
- be satisfied with the amount of time to spend with their own children (47% vs. 59%)

Among all early career pediatricians, the majority were satisfied with their residency training, their current work and their life as a whole (see Figure 2).

“There is little information available to residents contemplating fellowship training, particularly on what happens in their work and life after fellowship,” said Bobbi J. Byrne, M.D., FAAP, lead author of the study and chair of the PLACES project advisory committee. “I think program directors and mentors will find our data valuable as they counsel residents pertaining to career choices. Also, residents should be reassured that with either choice, they are very likely to be happy with their work as a pediatrician and their life in general.”