

Life Course Theory and Physician Career Trajectories

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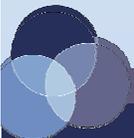
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Presentation at the
International Medical Workforce Conference
Vancouver, Canada

March 24, 2007

Today's Presentation: An Overview

- Why life course theory?
- Basic principles of life course research
- Applications to physician workforce research
- Where do we go from here?
- Easier said than done



Why Life Course Theory?

- Emerging physician shortages, maldistribution in rural areas, imbalances in distribution across specialties, under-representation from racial/ethnic minorities
- Policy interventions aimed at addressing workforce issues are based on a very limited understanding of how physician careers are organized over time
- Need better understanding of physician career trajectories and life histories



The Life Course

The life course model emphasizes that individuals, institutions and social structures **change over time** and that human lives are located in **specific historical times** and **places** that shape their content, pattern and direction.

Glen Elder, "The Life Course and Human Development: Contributions, Challenges, and New Directions", April 7, 2006



Life Course Theory: A New Lens for Examining Physician Supply

Life course research suggests the need for:

1. **Longitudinal** analyses that characterize how individual physicians' careers unfold over time
2. A better understanding of how physicians' career decisions are “a joint function of the characteristics of **the person and the environment**”¹
3. More **temporally sensitive analyses** that investigate the interaction of period, age and gender cohort effects on career decisions.

¹Bronfenbrenner, Urie. (1989). Ecological Systems Theory. pp 187-249 in *Six Theories of Child Development, Revised Formulations and Current Editions*, Ross Vesta, editor. JAI Press



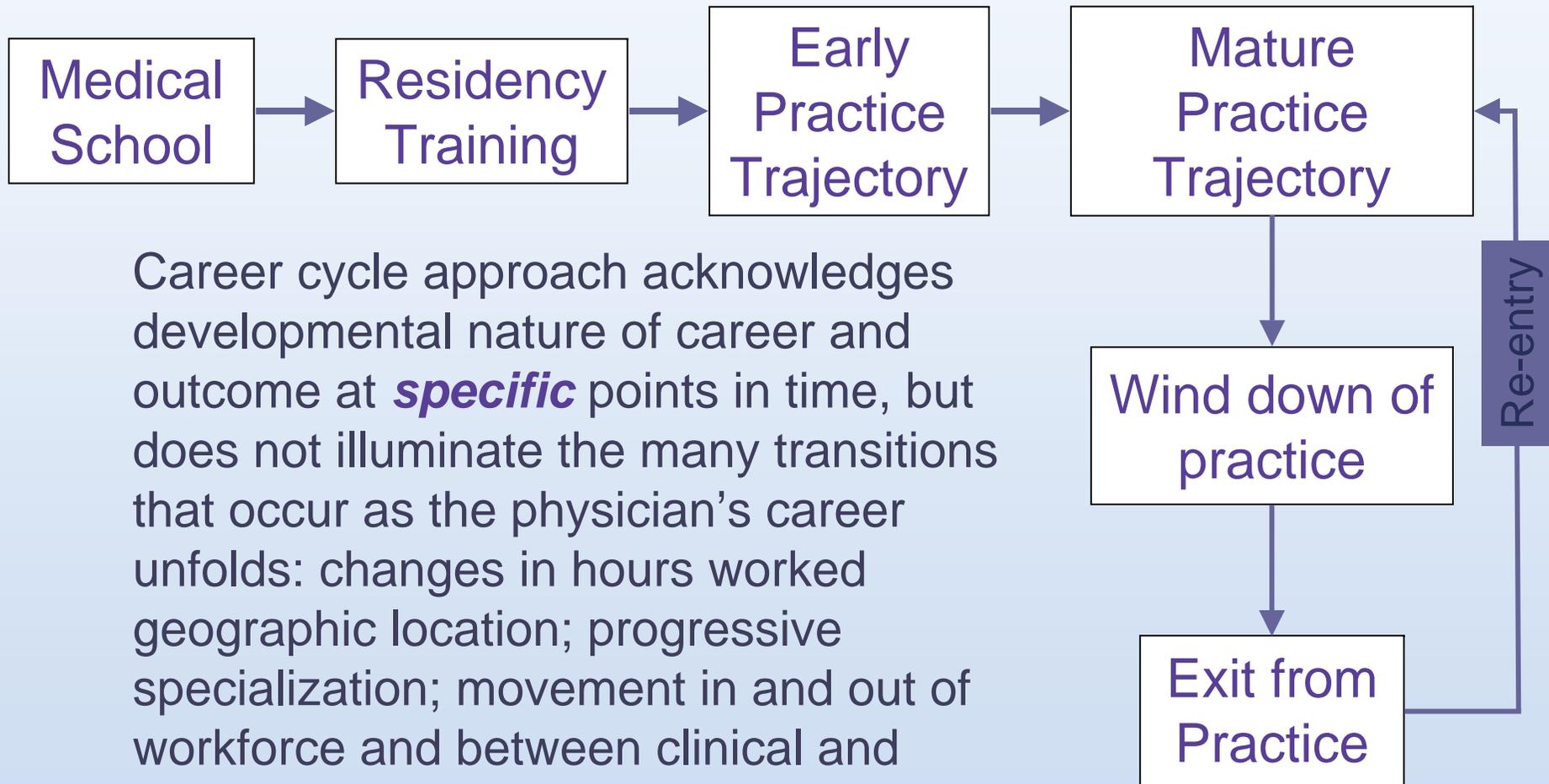
Longitudinal Analyses

Use of concatenated files to create physician-specific career histories will:

- Illuminate the dynamic nature of physician career trajectories – careers are comprised of multiple transitions into and out of various states
- Move away from cross-sectional analyses that do not inform questions of individual mobility and evolution of individual physician's career over time
- Move beyond career cycle and event analyses



Traditional Approaches: The Career Cycle Approach



Career cycle approach acknowledges developmental nature of career and outcome at *specific* points in time, but does not illuminate the many transitions that occur as the physician's career unfolds: changes in hours worked geographic location; progressive specialization; movement in and out of workforce and between clinical and administrative roles



Context, Context, Context

- Medical practice and social structures have undergone dramatic change
- Need to identify relationship between physicians' career decisions and the changing **context** of medical practice, social and reimbursement structures
- Will uncover “a path whose twists and turns are a result of the complex interactions between a ‘minded self’ and the environment.”²

²Clausen JA (1998). “Life Reviews and Life Stories” pgs 189-212 in *Methods of Life Course Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Janet Z. Giele and Glen H. Elder (eds), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.



Temporal Considerations

Historical Time

The life course of individuals is embedded in and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime

- We need analyses of birth and/or medical school cohorts to investigate the importance of historical (e.g. period) effects on career decisions. Cohorts locate individuals in specific time.

Age Variation

The impact of a life transition or event is contingent on when it occurs in a person's life

- We need to look at age effects as cohorts move through careers and through time



Gender Considerations

*Human kind may be divided into three groups—
men, women, and women physicians*

Sir William Osler

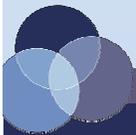
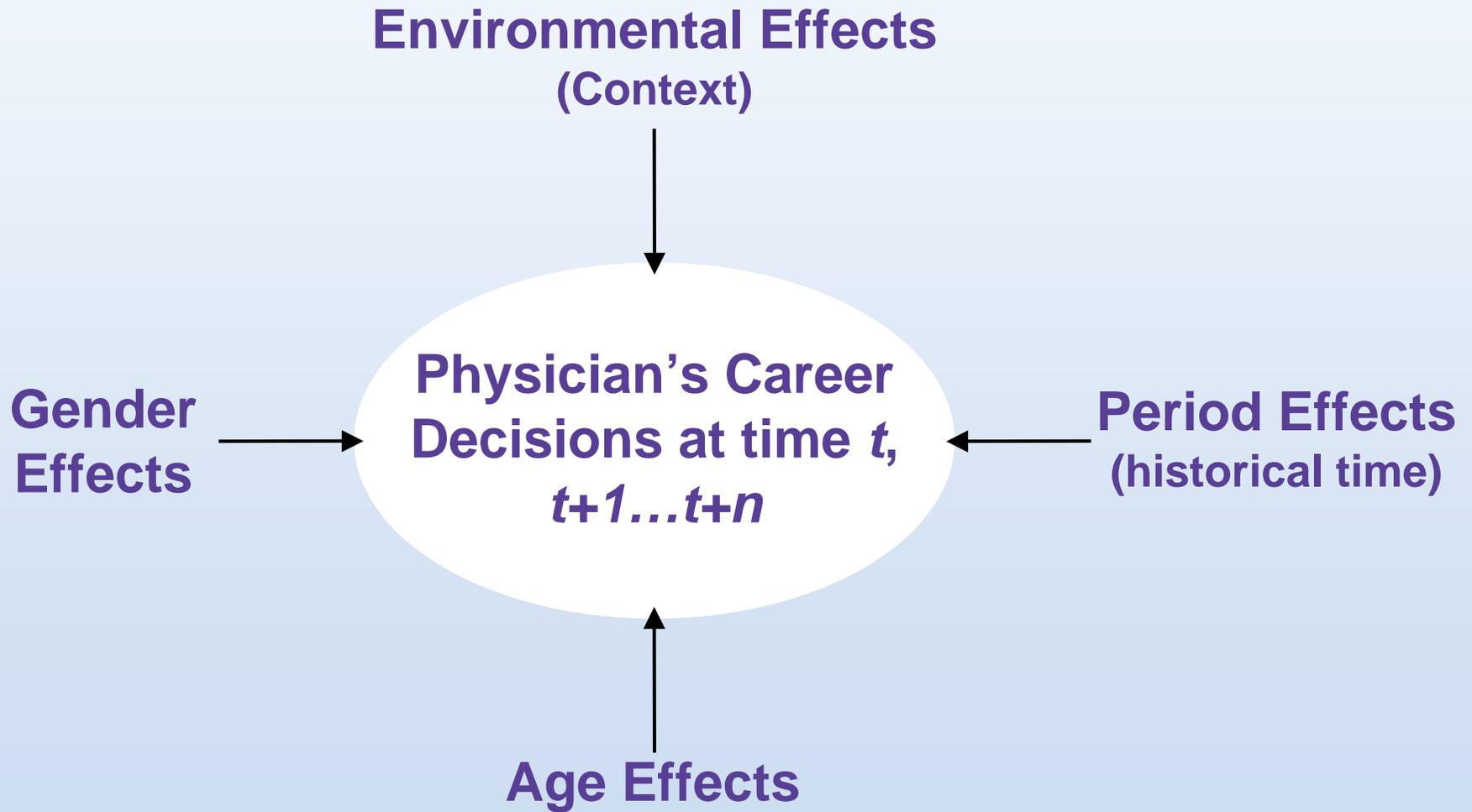
Social expectations of women have changed dramatically and more women have entered medicine. There is abundant evidence that women practice differently than men

- Need to account for gender effects as different cohorts move through careers in different time periods



Factors Influencing Physician's Career Decisions

Time t , $t+1$ years, $t + n$ years



Where do we go from here?

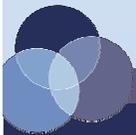
- Current supply models are not dynamic
- Point-in-time surveys are informative but not definitive
- Policy interventions aimed at specific events are not sensitive to where physician is in career and age/gender/period cohort effects
- Need to borrow analytical models of life course research to frame new ways of looking at physician workforce that are longitudinal, context- and temporally-sensitive



Easier said than done...

We need:

- Longitudinal panel data sets
- To define measures of the micro, meso and macro contextual factors that influence physician behavior
- Cohort analyses that track physicians over different time periods
- Mixed methods: qualitative and quantitative data
- Retrospective life and career history reviews combined with secondary data
- Funding: These are expensive undertakings
- To translate research findings into policy



Oh, and one more thing....
GO HEELS!

