Occupational Heritability in Medicine*

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Abstract

Occupational dynasties raise questions of social mobility, allocative efficiency and entry barriers in licensed professions. We study occupational heritability in medicine using survey and administrative data on French medical students, who sort into residency positions through the National Ranking Examinations (NRE), a serial-dictatorship mechanism allocating solely by exam rank. Because rank pins down the feasible set and employers play no role, we compare specialty choices conditional on the choice set, abstracting from nepotism and employer discrimination, guided by a simple model in which parental occupation shifts skill accumulation, belief precision and tastes. First, children of physicians are 10 per cent of the sample, twelve times their workforce share. They have no ability advantage at entry but attain higher NRE ranks, an advantage concentrated among men and absent versus executives' children. Second, conditional on rank, they sort away from general practice towards more competitive specialties, a gap unexplained by performance, parental income or socioeconomic status. It depends on parental role models and insider knowledge of hours, on-call duty and, among men, income. Finally, children with a doctor only in the extended family show weaker patterns, suggesting parent-specific transmission of preferences and information. With favouritism excluded by design, information frictions and preference formation, not rents, appear to sustain dynasties.

Keywords: Occupational choice, Intergenerational persistence, Information frictions, Role models, Medical specialties, France
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