OBJECTIVE: To better understand and characterize clinical excellence in academia by exploring the perspectives of clinically excellent faculty in the top American departments of medicine. PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS: Between March 1 and May 31, 2007, 2 investigators conducted in-depth semistructured interviews with 24 clinically excellent Department of Medicine physicians at 8 academic institutions. Interview transcripts were independently analyzed by 2 investigators and compared for agreement. It is hoped that such work will lead to initiatives aimed at measuring and rewarding clinical excellence in our academic medical centers such that the most outstanding clinicians feel valued and decide to stay in academia to serve as role models for medical trainees. Medical knowledge – Becoming a medical doctor takes years of education. Putting that knowledge into practice, and being willing to look up what you may not know or remember is vital. Patient care and systems-based practice – General practitioners deal with patients. Extended work hours – There will be times in a general practitioner's life where you are on call or have to work holidays and weekends.

Advantages and challenges of working as a clinician in an academic department of medicine: academic clinicians' perspectives