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## The best- and worst-paying jobs in America

If you want to get rich, work in an operating room — if you like poverty, try a restaurant



Joe Vitti / AP  
Tip your server. They, and other restaurant employees, are among the worst-paid people in America.

By Jacquelyn Smith

**Forbes**

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C-level executives continue to stand out for what many consider to be their excessive pay, but it turns out they aren't, on average, bringing in the biggest paychecks. According to government data released Tuesday, doctors have the best-paying jobs in America.

In operating rooms across the country, surgeons earn an average of \$108.36 an hour, for an average annual salary of \$225,390, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates. The survey reflects May 2010 salary and employment data gathered from nearly 1.2

million businesses. Nine of the nation's 10 highest-paying occupations are in the medical field, including anesthesiologist, general practitioner, orthodontist, and obstetrician and gynecologist.

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Doctors' salaries are so high not only because of supply and demand but also to offset the amounts they have to invest in education and malpractice insurance. The 43,230 surgeons in the U.S. also work lengthy shifts and do complicated procedures to earn their sizeable salaries.

The second highest-paying job in America: anesthesiologist. These 34,820 high-earning medical professionals bring in \$105.82 an hour, for an average annual salary of \$220,100. That's about \$9,000 more than they made last year. But anesthesiologists, like others in medical work, can pay well into six figures a year in medical malpractice premiums.

Chief executives, the only non-doctors who crack the list of top-10 earners, earn an average of \$173,350 per year. That figure pales in comparison with what some execs at very big companies take home. Last year the

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highest paid chief executive in the U.S., UnitedHealth Group's Stephen Hemsley, earned \$102 million. The second-highest paid CEO, Qwest Communications' Edward Mueller, took home \$66 million in salary, bonus and stock. Chief executives hold the No. 9 spot for America's highest earners.

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At other end of the wage spectrum, employees in the food service industry dominate. Fast food cooks earn \$8.91 an hour, for an average annual salary of \$18,540. More than a half million people in the U.S. work as fast food cooks, and another 2.7 million are in food preparation and serving. Dishwashers and shampooers trail close behind, making \$18,680 and \$19,140, respectively.

The gap between America's highest- and lowest-paying jobs widens if you include perks and benefits. Health insurance, for example, often represents a third of an employee's salary and isn't offered for many low-paying jobs.

The good news is that workers at both ends of the spectrum made more last year, and across the U.S. the mean salary for all workers rose 2.1 percent to \$44,410.

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