THE DOCTOR IS NOT IN

Why Is There a Shortage of Primary-Care Physicians in the U.S.?

Primary-care physicians—those who cover comprehensive health needs and provide continuing care for their patients—were once the foundation of a high-value American health care system. But now there’s a looming deficit of the very professionals who health care reform depends on. Why may primary-care doctors soon become an endangered breed?

SUPPLY, DEMAND, AND THE FUTURE DECLINE OF PRIMARY CARE DOCTORS

The Association of American Medical Colleges projects that by 2025, the country will be close to 63,000 doctors short of the demand necessary to provide valuable medical care for its population. By 2025, that number could more than double.

Although physicians of all specialties will be needed, primary-care physicians—including family doctors, general practitioners, and pediatricians—will be seeing a considerable shortage in the coming years.

GROWING DEFICIT OF PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS

WHAT’S UP, DOC?

Waning Interest in the Career

Only 32 percent of physicians in the U.S. are primary-care providers. The rest are specialists in careers like cardiology, radiology, and dermatology.

69% SPECIALISTS

Recent surveys of GRADUATING MEDICAL SCHOOL SENIORS SHOW THAT ONLY A SMALL FRACTION WANT TO GO TO GO INTO PRIMARY-CARE MEDICINE.

Income Disparity

A Medscape report found that 54 percent of primary-care physicians don’t feel fairly compensated and are, on average, paid less than those that specialize. As a result, less choose primary care as a career.

AVERAGE SALARY (2011)

Looming Baby Boomer Wave

The percent of people in the U.S. over age 65 is expected to nearly double between 2000 and 2050. As they age, this senior population is more likely to develop multiple chronic conditions and will have to be cared for by primary-care physicians who specialize in long-term health management.

PERCENT OF THE U.S. POPULATION WHO ARE 65+

Retirees

ALMOST 25% OF PRIMARY-CARE DOCTORS ARE 56 OR OLDER.

AND IT’S LIKELY THAT MANY OF THESE PHYSICIANS WILL RETIRE WITHIN THE NEXT DECADE.

SOURCES: ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN MEDICAL COLLEGES, KAISER HEALTH NEWS, MEDSPEAKE, ADMINISTRATION ON AGING, AMERICAN ACADEMY OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS, COUNCIL ON GRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION