



The Physicians' Perspective: Medical Practice in 2008

Executive Summary

Healthcare is an issue of vital concern to most Americans, and has been in the public conversation nearly every day for years. At a time when both major political parties are calling for expanded healthcare access and a new Presidential administration and Congress are preparing to address the issue, one crucial viewpoint has been largely overlooked: that of the physicians themselves.

How do physicians across the country see the medical practice environment? How do they feel about the state of their profession, and that of the industry at large? What plans do they have for the future of their individual practices? Do they believe there are enough of them to handle an influx of more patients?

The Physicians' Foundation determined to answer these questions, and many more, through one of the largest and most comprehensive physician surveys ever conducted in the United States. Its goal was to give physicians a voice, so that their thoughts, ideas and concerns might be better understood by policy makers, employers, insurance companies and the public at large.

Through responses provided by approximately 12,000 physicians nationwide that included more than 800,000 data points – as well as through written comments by more than 4,000 physicians – the survey offers a unique and valuable insight into the practices and mindsets of today's doctors.

The results paint a grim picture that could have drastic implications for the nation's healthcare debate:

- **An overwhelming majority of physicians – 78% – believe there is a shortage of primary care doctors in the United States today.**
- **49% of physicians – more than 150,000 doctors nationwide – said that over the next three years they plan to reduce the number of patients they see or stop practicing entirely.**
- **94% said the time they devote to non-clinical paperwork in the last three years has increased, and 63% said that the same paperwork has caused them to spend less time per patient.**
- **82% of doctors said their practices would be “unsustainable” if proposed cuts to Medicare reimbursement were made.**
- **60% of doctors would not recommend medicine as a career to young people.**

Combine these statistics with recent studies showing that medical schools are graduating fewer and fewer students who will choose to become primary care doctors – and the future for both physicians and their patients seems uncertain at best.

In the years ahead, the condition of America’s primary care doctors as a profession will greatly affect the viability of our nation’s healthcare system. A positive and functional system of practices and doctors will ensure a motivated workforce as well as encourage a new generation of quality physicians, while widespread physician disincentive could jeopardize the quality of our medical workforce as well as the number of physicians available to see patients.

In the words of one physician who responded to the survey, “something has got to be done, and urgently, to assist physicians, especially primary care physicians” in order to maintain the viability of the medical profession and to ensure timely and effective access to the doctors on whom so many depend.

To read more about The Physicians’ Foundation and view their complete survey, please visit www.physiciansfoundation.org.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

“The Physicians’ Perspective: Medical Practice in 2008” survey was conducted between May and July 2008 by physician search and consulting firm Merritt, Hawkins & Associates. It was mailed to 270,000 primary care doctors and more than 50,000 specialists – virtually every physician engaged in active medical practice in the United States today. The total number of responses received was 11,950. According to an independent analysis by Chad Autry PhD, Professor of Statistics at Texas Christian University, the margin of error for this survey is less than one percent.

ABOUT THE PHYSICIANS’ FOUNDATION

The Physicians’ Foundation seeks to advance the work of practicing physicians and to improve the quality of healthcare for all Americans. The Foundation is unique in its commitment to working with physicians nationwide to create a more efficient and equitable healthcare system. The Physicians’ Foundation pursues its mission through a variety of activities including grantmaking and research. Since 2005, the Foundation has awarded more than \$22 million in multi-year grants. The Physicians’ Foundation was founded in 2003 through settlement of a class-action lawsuit brought by physicians and medical associations against private third-party payors. Additional information about The Physicians’ Foundation is available online at www.physiciansfoundation.org.