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## **NATIONAL SURVEY FINDS NUMEROUS PROBLEMS FACING PRIMARY CARE DOCTORS, PREDICTS ESCALATING SHORTAGE AHEAD**

*Report from The Physicians' Foundation says nearly half of all the nation's primary care physicians plan to stop practicing or reduce the number of patients they see*

Boston, November 18, 2008 – A survey released today by The Physicians' Foundation depicts widespread frustration and concern among primary care physicians nationwide, which could lead to a dramatic decrease in practicing doctors in the near future. The survey examined the causes behind the doctors' dissatisfaction, the state of their practices and the future of care. The resulting findings show the possibility of significantly decreased access for Americans in the years ahead, as many doctors are forced to reduce the number of patients they see or quit the practice of medicine outright.

An overwhelming majority – 78 percent – of physicians believe that there is an existing shortage of primary care doctors in the United States today. Additionally, nearly half of them – 49 percent, or more than 150,000 practicing doctors– say that over the next three years they plan to reduce the number of patients they see or stop practicing entirely.

“Going into this project we generally knew about the shortage of physicians; what we didn't know is how much worse it could get over the next few years,” said Lou Goodman, PhD, President, The Physicians' Foundation. “The bottom line is that the person you've known as your family doctor could be getting ready to disappear – and there might not be a replacement.”

The Physicians' Foundation believes the future of primary care could have a significant impact on the American healthcare debate.

“At a time when the new Administration and new Congress are talking about ways to expand access to healthcare, the harsh reality is that there might not be enough doctors to handle the increased number of people who might want to see them if they get health insurance,” said Walker Ray, MD, Vice President, The Physicians' Foundation. “It's as if we're talking about

expanding access to higher education without having enough professors to handle the influx of students. It's basic supply and demand.”

The reported reasons for the widespread frustration among physicians include increased time dealing with non-clinical paperwork, difficulty receiving reimbursement and burdensome government regulations. Physicians say these issues keep them from the most satisfying aspect of their job: patient relationships.

“Tens of thousands of primary care doctors face the same problems as millions of ordinary citizens: frustrations in dealing with HMOs and government red tape,” said Sandra Johnson, Board Member, The Physicians’ Foundation. “The thing we heard over and over again from the physicians was that they’re unhappy they can’t spend more time with their patients, which is why they went into primary care in the first place.”

To read more about The Physicians’ Foundation and view their complete survey, please visit [www.physiciansfoundation.org](http://www.physiciansfoundation.org).

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#### **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](http://www.physiciansfoundation.org).*