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2010 Recruitment Review: Demand for Psychiatrists Surging

Source: Phillip Miller is vice president of communications for Merritt Hawkins, a national physician search and consulting firm and a company of AMN Healthcare (NYSE: AHS), the largest health care staffing organization in the United States. He can be reached at phil.miller@amnhealthcare.com.

For the past 17 years, Merritt Hawkins has tracked data regarding the physician recruiting assignments it conducts nationwide. The firm's *2010 Review of Physician Recruiting Incentives* examines the 2,813 recruiting assignments Merritt Hawkins conducted during the 12-month period of April 1, 2009, to March 31, 2010.

Information included in the review offers insight into medical specialties most in demand and includes benchmark data indicating the types of financial and various other incentives hospitals, medical groups, and other organizations are offering to recruit physicians in a variety of specialties.

Who's in Demand?

The review indicates that demand for physicians across all specialties declined in 2010 relative to the last several years. Throughout its 22-year history, Merritt Hawkins has experienced several economic downturns, none of which resulted in a year-over-year decline in the number of search assignments it conducts.

However, the recent recession has proven to be the exception. A widespread decrease in utilization of medical services combined with tight capital markets significantly reduced the financial resources that hospitals, medical groups, and other organizations have been able to commit to physician recruiting in the last 12 to 18 months.

As a result, the number of physician search assignments Merritt Hawkins conducted during the 12-month period examined in the review decreased 14.5 percent from 2009 to 2010. The chart below shows Merritt Hawkins' search assignments year to year.

Number of Search Assignments by Year	
2010	2,813
2009	3,288
2008	3,146
2007	3,016

Many health care facilities have been in a holding pattern over the last one to two years, waiting for economic turnaround before engaging in medical staff expansion. The recession has also eroded the willingness and ability of many physicians to relocate. Given the financial climate, some physicians have chosen to ride out the recession where they are rather than embracing new opportunities, while others are restricted in their ability to move because of unfavorable real estate situations. Some older physicians, their financial portfolios downgraded by the recession, have chosen to postpone retirement, eliminating the need to recruit to replace them. These factors have contributed to a nationwide lull in physician recruiting in which many health care facilities with an acknowledged need for physicians postponed their recruiting efforts.

For health facilities that have proceeded with physician recruiting, the strongest area of demand remains primary care, defined as family practice, internal medicine, and pediatrics. For the fourth consecutive year, family medicine was Merritt Hawkins' most requested search assignment, followed by internal medicine (also for the fourth consecutive year). In the last several years,

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pediatrics has climbed the list of most requested search assignments and was the seventh most requested assignment this year (by contrast, in 2005 to 2006, pediatrics was not in the top 20). Following is a list of Merritt Hawkins' most requested physician search assignments by specialty.

Most Requested Specialty Searches of 2010

1. Family practice
2. Internal medicine
3. Psychiatry
4. Hospitalist
5. Emergency medicine
6. Orthopedic surgery
7. Pediatrics
8. OB/GYN
9. Radiology
10. General surgery

Primary care remains a focus for many health care facilities, based on a dwindling supply of practitioners and a rising demand for primary care services. The U.S. Census Bureau projects the nation's population will grow by 49 million from 2000 to 2020 at a time when few U.S. medical school graduates are expressing an interest in primary care. The Association of American Medical Colleges projects a shortage of 46,000 primary care physicians by 2025, a 37 percent deficit. In addition, Merritt Hawkins estimates that health reform will create the need for some 16,000 additional primary care physicians. This estimate assumes that 32 million people newly insured through health reform will generate an average of two more physician visits per capita annually than they did prior to obtaining coverage, resulting in 64 million additional physician visits per year. Using the Medical Group Management Association's average of 4,000 annual patient encounters handled per primary care doctor per year leads to the 16,000 figure cited above.

Crisis in Mental Health

The 2010 review signals a continued steep increase in demand for psychiatrists, a specialty where supply is increasingly unable

to keep up with demand. The number of psychiatry search assignments Merritt Hawkins conducts has increased in each of the last six years and psychiatry was the firm's third most-requested search assignment in 2010 (see chart).

2010	179
2008	106
2006	69
2004	54

Like primary care, psychiatry is a medical specialty that is attracting fewer U.S. medical school graduates, due in part to the comparatively low income psychiatrists earn relative to other specialists. In addition, psychiatry is a challenging specialty because positive patient results usually can only be achieved through long-term treatment with drugs or therapy. Procedure-oriented physicians, by contrast, practice a cleaner form of medicine in which doctors can achieve immediate results through surgery or diagnostic tests.

Lacking an influence of new doctors, psychiatry has become one of the oldest medical specialties. According to the AMA's Physician Master File, more than 50 percent of psychiatrists are 55 years of age or older and many are reaching retirement age. By contrast, only 28 percent of pediatricians, 18 percent of family physicians, and 22 percent of general surgeons are 55 years of age or older. About one-third of psychiatrists are international medical graduates compared to less than one-quarter of the total physician population. As the supply of psychiatrists tightens, the incidence of behavioral health problems in the United States continues to increase. The Bureau of Health Professions projects that demand for general psychiatry services will increase 19 percent from 1995 to 2020, while demand for child and adolescent psychiatric services will increase 100 percent within the same timeframe. Psychiatric problems related to stress are particularly prevalent

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MARKET WATCH

Income Offered to Top 10 Recruited Specialties

Base salary or income guarantee only, does not include production bonus or benefits.

Specialty	Average Income 2009–2010
Family Practice	\$175,000
Pediatrics	\$180,000
Internal Medicine	\$191,000
Hospitalist	\$208,000
Psychiatry	\$209,000
Emergency Medicine	\$247,000
OB/GYN	\$272,000
General Surgery	\$314,000
Radiology	\$417,000
Orthopedic Surgery	\$519,000

Source: Merritt Hawkins' 2010 Review of Physician Recruiting Incentives

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during periods of high unemployment and economic downturn such as we are currently experiencing. Two ongoing wars also have contributed to psychological stress on many members of the military and their families.

Lack of access to psychiatric services, though the subject of less media attention than the shortage of primary care services, is shaping up as a national crisis. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services now designates 3,291 health professional shortage areas — in which 80 million Americans live — for mental health services nationwide. Unless the supply of psychiatrists and other mental health professionals can be enhanced, the number of shortage areas is likely to increase.

Trend toward Employment

The review underscores a further trend in physician recruiting — the move by physicians toward hospital employment and away from traditional independent practice. Fifty-one (51) percent of Merritt Hawkins' 2010 recruiting assignments featured hospital employment of physicians, up 45 percent from the previous year. The following chart shows the growth in number of search assignments featuring hospital employment.

Search Assignments Featuring Hospital Employment	
2010	51%
2009	45%
2008	45%
2007	43%
2006	23%
2004	19%

Physicians today, those in primary care and specialists, are embracing hospital employment to relieve them of the stress of high malpractice rates, the struggle for reimbursement, administrative duties, and the general risks and responsibilities of private practice. Hospitals are embracing the employed model in order to reduce physician/hospital competition, to ensure coverage of the emergency department, and to remain competitive in the recruiting market. The employed model also can create the physician/hospital alignment needed to develop and maintain accountable care organizations and to implement the bundled payment systems health reform is expected to generate.

The 2010 review includes additional information regarding physician recruiting trends and incentives and can be accessed at www.merrithawkins.com. ■

What's New at NEJM?

JOB OF THE WEEK

For those hard-to-fill medical and senior positions, including CMO and department head, the classifieds department now offers a unique marketing opportunity titled "Job of the Week." As part of the widely distributed NEJM electronic table of contents (eTOC), recruitment advertisers are able to insert a "Job of the Week" into the newsletter. The NEJM eTOC is distributed each Wednesday evening to more than 350,000 U.S. health care recipients. It is an opt-in newsletter that is published by the editors of NEJM. The "Job of the Week" feature allows a recruitment advertiser to promote one job posting with a long description and link to the full posting. For more information about this feature, please contact your recruitment sales representative or call (800) 635-6991.

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**UPCOMING
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MEETINGS
AND MEDICAL
CONVENTIONS**

**American College
of Cardiology***
April 3-5, 2011
New Orleans, LA
www.acc.org

**Internal Medicine/
American College
of Physicians (ACP)***
April 7-9, 2011
San Diego, CA
www.acponline.org

**Association of Program
Directors in Internal
Medicine (APDIM)***
April 10-13, 2011
Las Vegas, NV
(800) 622-4558
www.im.org/APDIM

**Society of Hospital
Physicians***
May 11-12, 2011
Dallas, TX
www.hospitalmedicine.org

*Call (800) 635-6991 or e-mail nejmads@nejm.org for more details on bonus convention distribution of your paid recruitment ad in selected NEJM issues at these physician conventions.

PROMOTIONAL NOTES/NEWS

Reach over 30,000 Final-Year Residents and Fellows for FREE with the February 24, 2011, Resident Reach Issue!*

Run a paid advertisement in the February 24 *Resident Reach* issue of NEJM, and in addition to the 200,000 physicians that read NEJM regularly, you'll reach 30,000 final-year residents and fellows in ALL specialties for FREE!*

Your ad will be reprinted in a special booklet and mailed to these job-seeking physicians, giving you the best access to the candidates. You can also connect to thousands of top physicians online, by posting your ad to the NEJM CareerCenter (NEJMJobs.org).**

ISSUE	CLOSING DATE	SPECIALTIES
February 24	February 4	All — Over 100*

All NEJMJobs.org advertisers receive FREE access to our profiles database, where recruiters can access the most up-to-date profiles of highly qualified, active, and passive physician job seekers.***

Contact us at (800) 635-6991 or nejmads@nejm.org to reserve your ad space for this issue and for complete promotional details.

**The recruitment section of the February 24 issue of NEJM is reprinted and mailed to approximately 30,000 final-year residents and fellows in all specialties whose address records appear in the AMA database. Counts are estimates only and are subject to change based on data collected by the AMA.*

***Processing fees may apply to posting your ad to the searchable part of the website.*

****Advertisers must have active job postings in order to access the profiles database. Duration of access is dependent on duration of online posting.*

(What's New at NEJM?/continued from page 3)

REDESIGNED eBULLETIN

On July 28, 2010, NEJM redesigned its popular weekly newsletter targeting residents, fellows, and medical students. This opt-in newsletter reaches 99,000 U.S. recipients each week and is assembled by the editorial staff of NEJM. The redesign streamlined the presentation of articles that will be of interest to physicians in training. Additionally, the redesign allowed for a stronger presence of recruitment advertisers interested in reaching residents and fellows with their message. If you're interested in finding out more about this recruitment product, please contact your recruitment sales representative or call (800) 635-6991.