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## Physician Shortage to Quadruple within Decade, AAMC Says

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The numbers do not look promising.

According to an Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) report, U.S. specialties will reach a shortage of 91,500 doctors by 2020. The AAMC predicts Americans will need an estimated 45,000 primary care physicians and 46,000 surgeons and medical specialists.

"It's certainly the worse [shortage] that we'll have seen in the last 30 years," says AAMC chief advocacy officer Atul Grover.

"For the first time since the 1930s, our number [of physicians] per capita will start to drop in the next couple of years. That's less doctors per person, but at the same time, since they are aging and have more chronic illnesses, each person is going to need more healthcare and not less healthcare. That's a pretty bad situation," he says.

There are currently 709,700 physicians (in all specialties) for a demand of 723,400 physicians, with an existing shortage of 13,700. By comparison, in 2020, there will be 759,800 physicians (in all specialties) for a demand of 851,300 physicians, essentially a shortage of 91,500 too few doctors, according to the report.

One third of all physicians will be turning in their white coat and stethoscope for retirement, states the report, but the supply of doctors will only increase by 7%,

according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

With a tug of war between supply and demand, the predicted shortage of doctors will leave many Americans without any, or with insufficient, care. The most affected areas will likely to be rural regions and inner-city areas, according to the report. Because physicians are not evenly distributed across the country per capita, there are likely to be gaps in provider services in less-recruitable parts of the country, such as rural and inner-city areas.

## Crunching the Numbers

The shortage of 91,500 is a higher estimate than other studies have previously reported. The AAMC report is based on data from the Center for Workforce, which includes utilization of medical care, as well as census projections of the U.S. population. Researchers factored in physician retirement rates, increases in doctors from various specialties and regions, and healthcare insurance expansion.

With healthcare reform, 32 million more Americans will have access to medical insurance and 36 million to Medicare, the report says.

"As more people get insured, they are going to seek out the care they probably should have been getting all along but haven't been able to necessarily access. That's why those numbers look worse in the next 10 years than we previously had estimated," Grover says.

Perhaps more significantly, the demand is increasing because of the growing population of seniors, estimated to grow by 37%, according to the Census Bureau.

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“The overall reason for the physician shortage has [less] to do with reform; it has more to do with the aging U.S. population,” Grover says. “As we get this silver tsunami of baby boomers coming at us over the next 10 years or so, what you’re going to see is their need for healthcare is going to be much higher on a per-capita basis than younger adults.”

Older persons often require more specialty care, especially as the chances of cancer increases with age. In addition, there are more treatment options available to older Americans to prolong their lives, thus requiring more care.

**Possible Solutions**

With this dark forecast of numbers of too few physicians to care for too many people, how should health leaders adapt? AAMC offers the following solutions:

1. **Increased federal support of residency programs** through Medicare, the primary source of graduate medical education funding. Since the Balanced Budget Act passed in 1997, teaching hospitals are restricted to a capped number of resident physicians they can claim under Medicare reimbursement. Teaching hospitals therefore accept more residents to accommodate community needs beyond that maximum limit, totaling 7,000 residents of which teaching hospitals pay for out of pocket, according to Grover.

2. **Medicare support for 15% more residency training** (about 15,000 residency slots). Seven thousand new medical school students are expected to graduate every year, states the report. Additional subsidized graduate medical education could add on 4,000 more physicians every year.

3. **More effective use of healthcare providers** to include advance practice nurses and physician assistants and team-based approaches, such as the medical home model.

“We’re going to have to figure out how to be more efficient in the way we deliver care, how to use other healthcare professionals to the top of their licensed skill sets, and also figure out how to get more physicians out there into communities by training more,” Grover says.

Even with 91,500 too few physicians in the forecast, there’s still time to meet the growing need for medical care, according to Grover.

“You have to remember it takes about seven years to train a physician. What we’re talking about is in the next year or two, we really need to start expanding those residency training programs to take in those larger medical school classes,” Grover says. “It has to start in the next year or two.” ■

**Coming Soon!**

**RESULTS OF THE NEW “HOW PHYSICIANS  
SEARCH FOR JOBS” STUDY**

Zeldis Research Associates, Inc., conducted an independent, blinded study of physicians, fellows, and residents. Find out which sources physicians use to look for jobs, which print and online sources they value most, what they look for in a job website, and much more!

Look for information in a future issue of RPT on how to request your copy of the highlights from this study.

**MARKET WATCH**

**Projected Supply and Demand, Full-Time Equivalent Physicians Active in Patient Care Post Health Care Reform, 2008–2025**

Year	Physician Supply (All Specialties)	Physician Demand (All Specialties)	Physician Shortage (All Specialties*)	Physician Shortage (Non-Primary Care Specialties)
2008	699,100	706,500	7,400	None
2010	709,700	723,400	13,700	4,700
2015	735,600	798,500	62,900	33,100
2020	759,800	851,300	91,500	46,100
2025	785,400	916,000	130,600	64,800

Source: AAMC Center for Workforce Studies, June 2010 Analysis  
\*Total includes primary care, surgical, and medical specialties.

**AAMC Studies Show Deficit across Specialties**

Current analysis by the AAMC not only factors in the expansion of health care insurance as a result of reform, but also the changes in physician retirements and specialty choice, as well. This newer model illustrates the critical shortfall in the number of all physician specialties that care for older adults. Even 5 years from now — in 2015 — there will be a deficit of 62,900 physicians. Looking ahead to 15 years from now, in 2025 — that shortage is likely to have doubled, with a projected deficit of more than 130,000 physicians across all specialties.

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Recruitment advertisers now have the opportunity to sponsor the new NEJM CareerCenter iPhone app. A single exclusive sponsorship spot is available each month on the app. Sponsorship includes a 320 x 50 ad unit that displays for 10 seconds when each of the sections are accessed, then retracts until the next section is accessed. The sponsorship ad unit can link to any website the advertiser chooses. Slots are limited to one advertiser per month, with a minimum two-month buy. Contact your sales rep or call (800) 635-6991 for availability and pricing.



**What's New at NEJM?**

**NEJM CAREERCENTER RELEASES NEW IPHONE APP**

On February 14, 2011, the official NEJM CareerCenter iPhone app was made available for download at the iTunes app store.

NEJM CareerCenter is a new, FREE iPhone app that provides physicians with on-the-go access to the latest job listings. All job postings on the NEJM CareerCenter website ([www.nejmjobs.org](http://www.nejmjobs.org)) will now be available to physicians who download the free app. A recent survey of young physicians' job-seeking behavior showed that a majority of respondents were interested in having jobs available through a mobile app.

The new app allows physicians to:

- Search and view both permanent and *locum tenens* jobs
- Filter by specialty, position type, or location
- E-mail jobs of interest to their account to apply for later

**UPCOMING  
RECRUITER  
MEETINGS  
AND MEDICAL  
CONVENTIONS**

**American College  
of Cardiology\***  
April 3–5, 2011  
New Orleans, LA  
[www.acc.org](http://www.acc.org)

**Internal Medicine/  
American College  
of Physicians (ACP)\***  
April 7–9, 2011  
San Diego, CA  
[www.acponline.org](http://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](http://www.im.org/APDIM)

**Society of Hospital  
Physicians\***  
May 11–12, 2011  
Dallas, TX  
[www.hospitalmedicine.org](http://www.hospitalmedicine.org)

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**PROMOTIONAL NOTES/NEWS**

**Receive Free Bonus Circulation and Reach Physicians in Practice, 2012 Residents and Fellows, and Program Directors!**

Don't miss out on the opportunity to receive free bonus distribution of your recruitment ad in these two special issues. Simply run a paid print (line or display) ad in the selected NEJM issues below and your ad will automatically get reprinted and mailed to the target audience for that issue. Maximize your reach and run your ad in both issues!

Additionally, you will receive exposure online and via e-mail, as you may opt to have your ad posted at NEJM CareerCenter ([www.nejmjobs.org](http://www.nejmjobs.org)), the heavily trafficked companion website of the *New England Journal of Medicine*.<sup>‡</sup> And we'll send targeted e-mails to registered physicians whose search criteria match your ad. PDFs of each booklet will also be posted on the home page of NEJM CareerCenter.

Reserve your space today! Contact us at (800) 635-6991 or at [nejmads@nejm.org](mailto:nejmads@nejm.org).

- SPECIAL ISSUE:** *In Practice* 4–5 years\*
  - NEJM ISSUE:** April 28, 2011
  - CLOSING DATE:** April 8, 2011
  - AUDIENCE:** Physicians in practice 4 to 5 years
  - SPECIALTIES:** IM, IM subspecialties, pediatric subspecialties, surgical subspecialties, and more!
  - BONUS REACH:** 30,000<sup>†</sup>
- 
- SPECIAL ISSUE:** *MD Career Path* Resource Guide\*
  - NEJM ISSUE:** June 2, 2011
  - CLOSING DATE:** May 13, 2011
  - AUDIENCE:** 2012 residents and fellows; program directors
  - SPECIALTIES:** All specialties — over 100!
  - BONUS REACH:** 38,000<sup>†</sup>

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<sup>†</sup>Specialty and direct mail list counts are estimates only and are subject to change based on data collected by the AMA.

<sup>‡</sup>Processing fees may apply to have your ad posted on the searchable part of the website.