

AMA-RFS Issue Brief

Support for Graduate Medical Education

BACKGROUND

The Census Bureau estimates that by 2025, the U.S. population will increase to 350 million, considerably increasing the need for physicians. Beginning in 2011, 78 million baby boomers will turn 65 and are likely to have increasingly complex co-morbid conditions. Currently, 1 in 3 practicing physicians is age 55 or older and likely to retire within the next 2 decades. Meanwhile, although enrollments in medical school have been increasing by about 2% per year for several years, the number of residency positions has not kept pace. These factors are combining to create an estimated shortage of 124,000- 159,000 physicians by 2025. Moreover, providing as many as 32 million more U.S. citizens with insurance could make it difficult to provide ongoing, comprehensive care and result in many patients facing longer wait times and more fragmented care for episodes of illness. Medically underserved rural and inner-city populations will be especially at risk.

THE AMA'S POSITION

The health system reform law (Affordable Care Act) takes some steps to address physician shortages. Beginning in July 2011, the law authorizes the redistribution of 65 percent of currently unused graduate medical education (GME) positions to qualifying hospitals. However, this represents fewer than 1000 entry level positions. The law also provides more flexibility for GME programs to count training in outpatient settings towards funding. A National Health Care Workforce Commission has been established to provide recommendations to Congress on health care workforce needs. In addition, the law authorizes increased funding for the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and Title VII health professions and diversity programs in order to increase the number of physicians and other health care professionals in underserved areas.

The AMA continues to advocate for solutions to address the physician workforce shortage. The AMA has collaborated with many organizations, including medical schools, to create incentives for recruiting and training physicians in primary-care and other undersupplied specialties. In addition, the AMA continues to advocate for an expansion in the number of Medicare supported GME residency training positions in undersupplied specialties as well as in underserved areas, including supporting federal legislation, S.973/H.R.2251, "the Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act," which would increase GME slots. The AMA also continues to advocate for adequate funding for the NHSC and Title VII health professions and diversity programs, as well as other federal and state initiatives that have been successful in creating incentives for physicians to practice in physician shortage specialties and in undersupplied areas. The AMA is also a proponent of loan forgiveness programs for graduating residents and fellows who practice in underserved areas.

References:

The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections Through 2025. Center for Workforce Studies, American Association of Medical Colleges. 2008. Physicians and Their Practices Under Health Care Reform. The Physicians Foundation, Inc. 2009. Bolster primary care: Avert a physician shortage The AMA is pursuing efforts to make primary care more rewarding and appealing to doctors. Editorial. Jan. 5, 2009. American Medical News

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Communicate your concerns about the physician shortages and the need to lift the cap on Medicare supported GME positions to your Congressional representatives
- Get involved with the AMA-RFS Legislative Advocacy Committee and join the RFS listserv
- Donate to AMPAC and support candidates who are working to expand access to care by supporting physicians in practice
- Visit: <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/rfs>

References:

The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections Through 2025. Center for Workforce Studies, American Association of Medical Colleges. 2008. Physicians and Their Practices Under Health Care Reform. The Physicians Foundation, Inc. 2009. Bolster primary care: Avert a physician shortage The AMA is pursuing efforts to make primary care more rewarding and appealing to doctors. Editorial. Jan. 5, 2009. American Medical News