AMA mapping tool identifies where workforce needs are greatest

OCT 31, 2018

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A customizable, AMA data-visualization tool that has been used to locate physician shortage areas and allocate resources is now mobile-friendly and has more publicly accessible data to facilitate research or guide public health decisions.

The AMA Health Workforce Mapper has been used by physicians and medical residents to help them decide where they are needed most. The tool can also be used by researchers, journalists, legislators, policymakers and others to better understand trends and identify gaps in patient access to care.

The updated tool provides more information on an area's physician and nonphysician health care workforce, with more granular listing of specialists and subspecialists by state, county, ZIP code and census tract. The mapper uses data from the AMA and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

"With the updated mapping tool, physicians and health care professionals will be able to more precisely and easily pinpoint the areas and populations which could benefit most from their skills and services," said AMA President Barbara L. McAneny, MD. "Physicians can use this information to help them determine where to locate or expand their practices to reach patients in greatest need of access to care."

Picture of health

The AMA Health Workforce Mapper gives users a snapshot of a region's health and health care systems. This includes health statistics for individual congressional districts, medically underserved areas and populations—plus data for individual Health Professional Shortage Areas for primary care, dental care and behavioral health.

In addition to workforce data, the tool provides information on an area's health care facilities, geographic features such as highways, mountains or waterways and other environmental factors that could facilitate or hinder health care access or distribution.

The tool's Population Health Explorer uses data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to display a variety of health factors, including:

- Morbidity and mortality rates per health indicator.
- Rates on hospital readmissions and health insurance coverage rates.
- Smoking and alcohol use.

With these features, users can see where physicians practice and the factors that influence patient health and access to care.

Useful tool for health advocates

The AMA Health Workforce Mapper has been used in Idaho, for example, to successfully advocate for expanding medical education funding and graduate medical education programs—especially in rural areas.

State and specialty societies also have found the Health Workforce Mapper to be a useful tool in advocating for telemedicine and collaborative care, as well as for giving lawmakers data-driven insights into policy questions surrounding scope of practice.

For example, the Ohio State Medical Association used the Health Workforce Mapper to create a poster that was used in the state health committee hearing on a bill that would have given advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) the ability to practice without the needed safeguard of physician supervision.

The poster displayed the practicing locations for primary care physicians and APRNs in Ohio, showing that APRNs had workforce patterns similar to primary care physicians' and that loosening the rules for collaboration was unlikely to result in more APRNs practicing in underserved rural areas.

The newly expanded Health Workforce Mapper, developed in collaboration with the American Academy of Family Physicians Robert Graham Center and HealthLandscape, is available free.

AMA members can view a comprehensive version of the tool that includes the capacity to export a customizable Microsoft Excel file that ranks the health care workforce and demographic data by county.