Physician-owned practices dip below 50 percent

Less than half of practicing physicians own their own practice, according to 2016 data collected in a nationally representative survey of 3,500 U.S.-based physicians who provide at least 20 hours of patient care per week and are not employed by the federal government.

2016 marks the first year in which physician practice ownership is no longer the majority arrangement. According to data drawn from the AMA's Physician Practice Benchmark Surveys, 47.1 percent of physicians are practice owners. The same percentage of physicians are employed, while 5.9 percent are independent contractors.

The data reflect a trend that has been evident in recent years. In 2012, the first year in which this AMA survey was conducted, 53.2 percent of physicians were owners. That figure dropped three percentage points to 50.8 percent in 2014. The AMA conducted similar surveys in the 1980s, when physician practice ownership was the dominant arrangement. For example, in 1983, by comparison, 76.1 percent of physicians were practice owners, as noted in a 2015 report.

"Patients benefit when physicians practice in settings they find professionally and personally rewarding, and the AMA strongly supports a physician's right to practice in the setting of their choice," said AMA President Andrew W. Gurman, MD. "The AMA is committed to helping physicians navigate their practice options and offers innovative strategies and resources to ensure physicians in all practice sizes and setting can thrive in the changing health environment."

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