

WASHINGTON STATE HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH PROJECT

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Profile of Washington State's Family Medicine Physicians

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Introduction

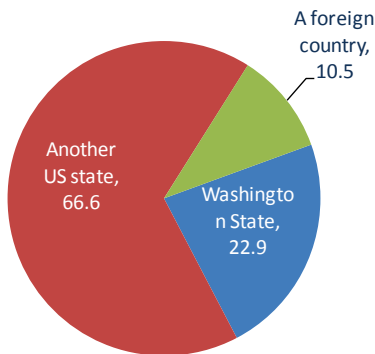
Family Medicine (FM) physicians provide comprehensive primary care to the population. FM physicians, along with other providers who also provide primary care, are expected to play an increased role in delivering health care under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). To help assess the current primary care workforce, the Office of Financial Management (OFM) conducted the 2011 Washington State Physician Survey of Family Medicine, General Practice, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics, OB/GYN, and Geriatrics.¹ According to the survey, approximately 2,735 FM physicians were practicing in Washington in 2011 at the time of the survey (summer of 2011). This study presents analysis of characteristics and practice patterns of the 2,735 FM physicians as represented by the 1,364 survey respondents.

Physician Characteristics

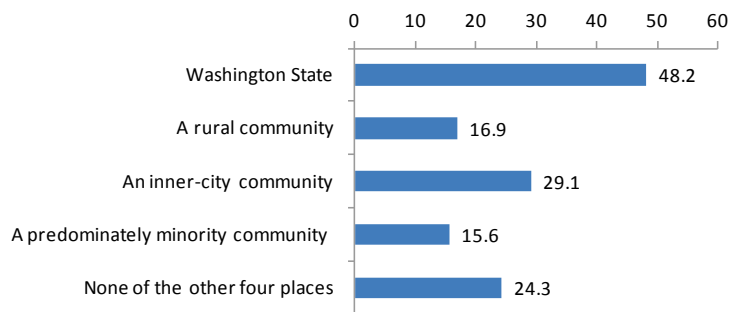
In 2011, the average age of FM physicians in Washington was 50. While there were more male than female FM physicians, the latter group accounted for 42 percent of the total, a share that is higher than the corresponding female share of all licensed physicians in Washington.² For racial background, 86.4 percent of FM physicians described themselves as white, followed by 13 percent as Asian or Pacific Islander, 1.4 percent Black or African American, and 1.3 percent American Indian or Alaska Native. Two percent of FM physicians chose "Other" for race instead of or in addition to the four categories mentioned previously. FM physicians of Hispanic origin accounted for 3.7 percent of the total.

For their medical education, 90 percent of FM physicians reported having a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) degree. The remaining physicians reported Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.) and other degrees. Although Washington State's medical education institutions produced 22.9 percent of FM physicians currently practicing in this state, Washington relies heavily on "importing" FM physicians from other states. Two thirds of the FM physicians (66.6 percent) received their medical education in other states. Those who received their medical education in foreign countries constituted 10.5 percent of FM physicians.

**Place of Medical Education (%)
FM Physicians, 2011**



**Place of Residency/Internship (%)
FM Physicians, 2011**



¹ The survey is also known as the 2011 Washington State Primary Care Physician Survey. For more information about the survey itself, see http://www.ofm.wa.gov/healthcare/deliverysystem/2011_PCP_survey_frequency_report.pdf.

² See <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/researchbriefs/2010/brief058.pdf>.

The survey asked physicians whether they had their residency or internship training in the following places: Washington State, a rural community, an inner-city community, a predominantly minority community, or none of the above places.³ Almost half (48 percent) of the FM physicians did their residency or internship in Washington, 17 percent in a rural community, 29.1 percent in an inner-city community, and 15.6 percent in a predominantly minority community while 24.3 reported their residency or intern training occurred in a place other than those mentioned above.

More than one third of the FM physicians (34.6 percent) were bilingual or multilingual in communicating clinical matters. In addition to English, 18.8 percent could communicate in Spanish, 3.3 percent in Spanish plus other language(s), and 12.5 percent in other non-Spanish language(s).

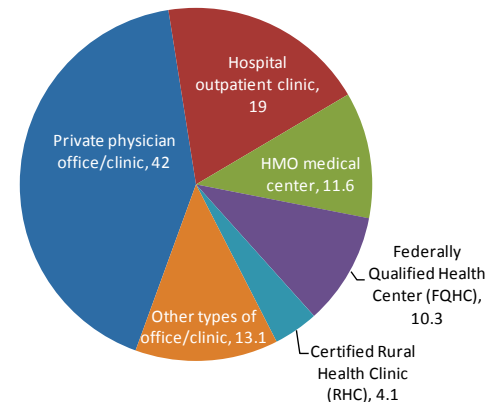
For analytical purpose, this analysis groups the Washington State's counties into 10 regions, based on the grouping method used by the Washington State Population Survey⁴. According to this method, the urban counties of Clark, King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Spokane each form a region of their own. Kitsap and Thurston form the Other Puget Sound Metro region. Benton, Franklin, and Yakima form the Yakima-TriCities region. Island, San Juan, Skagit, and Whatcom form the North Sound region. The other counties form the East Balance region and the West Balance region with the Cascades as the dividing line. The largest share of FM physicians (36.2 percent) had their homes in the King region.

Characteristics of Primary Practice Site

Analysis in this section pertains to the practice site where the physician spent most of their weekly work hours if he or she worked at more than one site.

Somewhat in proportion to where they resided, the largest share of FM physicians (34.7 percent) had their primary practice sites in the King region. Nearly all FM physicians (96.5 percent) worked at a site that mostly provided primary care. The most common practice site where 42 percent of FM physicians worked was a private physician office or clinic, followed by hospital outpatient clinics (19 percent), HMO medical centers (11.6 percent), Federally Qualified Health Centers (10.3 percent), Certified Rural Health Clinics (4.1 percent), and some other settings (13.1 percent). Many FM physicians also worked at sites that had nurse practitioners (ARNPs) and physician assistants (PAs) on staff. The shares of FM physicians who worked at sites with ARNPs and PAs were 42 percent and 45.9 percent, respectively.

**Type of Primary Practice Site (%)
FM Physicians, 2011**



Need for interpreter services at the practice site was reported by 61.7 percent of the FM physicians. The FM physicians' practice sites were able to meet most of the need, but not all of it, as 10.4 percent of the physicians reported that their sites did not have adequate access to needed interpreter services.

Practice Characteristics

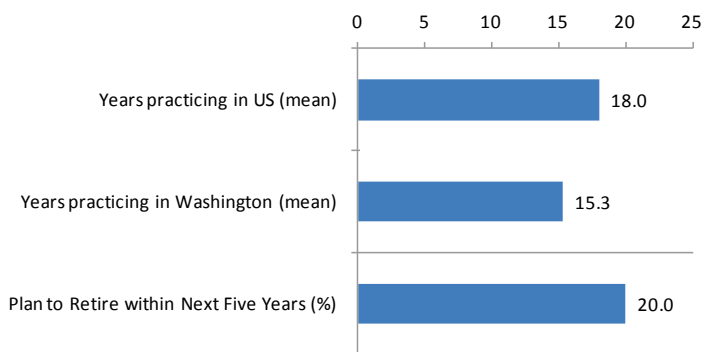
FM physicians have a long practice history with an average of 18 years overall and 15.3 of those years in Washington. This pattern suggests that many of FM physician are nearing retirement. In fact, when asked when they plan to retire, 20 percent of FM physicians reported that they planned to retire within the next five years. In a typical week, FM physicians spent 44.7 hours on the job with about 36 of those hours devoted to direct patient care and the remaining hours in administration of clinical practice (5.5 hours) and other physician activities (3.6 hours). In 2010, the FM physicians averaged 45.9 weeks of work. When each physician's work hours per

³ The respondent physician was allowed to make more than one choice from the first four choices.

⁴ <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/sps/default.asp>

week and number of weeks of work in 2010 were converted into full-time equivalencies, the average FTE per physician was 0.9 (1.0 being the upper boundary).

Practice History, FM Physicians, 2011



As the scope of practice for FM physicians is mostly primary care, there was no surprise that nearly all of them (97 percent) said half or more of their direct patient hours were spent in primary care. For many FM physicians, their work hours extend beyond the 8-5 weekdays. Almost half (48.1 percent) of FM physicians who treated patients in early mornings, evenings, or weekends. A sizeable fraction of FM physicians also worked at two or more sites (22.1 percent). Finally, 74.6 percent participated in provider networks.

Patient Workload

FM physicians reported that in 2010, they had about 1,670 patients per physician under their care. Medicaid-covered patients accounted for 20.3 percent of their patients. Three quarters of the FM physicians (74.8 percent) were accepting new patients at the time of the survey. Among those accepting new patients, 28.6 percent reported that they would accept no new Medicaid patients.

A typical weekly patient workload included on average 91.5 patient visits per FM physician. These visits took place in a variety of settings. Visits at the physician office or an outpatient clinic formed the majority (69.2 visits) of the total visits. The remaining visits were distributed as follows: 3.9 for hospital rounds, 1.4 for nursing home or patient home visits, 9.4 for telephone consultation, and 7.5 for email or other electronic consultation.

Factors Affecting Physician Practice in Treating Medicaid and Commercial Insurance Plan Patients

Physicians were asked to rate seven factors that might affect their practice in relation to Medicaid and commercial plans. They rated these factors on a five-point scale from “no problem” to “major problem.” With regard to Medicaid, the factor of “reimbursement rate” was the most salient issue for FM physicians. It was chosen by 51.9 percent as a “major problem.” The next most salient issue for FM physicians was “acceptance of referrals by specialists,” reported by 39.5 percent. Other factors that were rated as “major problem” by a relatively large percentage of the FM physicians included “complexity of patient needs” (27.4 percent) and “time spent on paperwork” (23.5 percent).

With regard to commercial plans, the most salient issue is “time spent on paperwork”, considered as a “major problem” by 11.7 percent of the FM physicians. Note, though, this percentage is much smaller than the corresponding percentage for Medicaid (23.5 percent). The remaining factors were rated as “major problem” by relatively smaller fractions (5.8 percent to 1.5 percent) of the FM physicians concerning commercial plans.

Summary

Like the general population in Washington, FM physicians currently practicing in Washington are an aging workforce with an average age of 50. Female FM physicians (42 percent) are outnumbered by male physicians by about 16 percentage points, although this difference is smaller than that found in all licensed physicians in Washington. Approximately 90 percent of the FM physicians have an M.D. degree. Two thirds of all FM physicians were graduates of medical schools in other states, one tenth in other countries, and the remaining two

tenths were the products of the state's own medical education institutions. Nearly half of them (48.2 percent) received their residency or internship in Washington, a possible factor for their decision to remain practicing in the state. Approximately one-third of these physicians can speak one or more languages in addition to English for clinical purposes. Slightly over one third of FM physicians reside and practice in the King region (36.2 percent and 34.7 percent, respectively).

FM physicians practice at a variety of settings. The most common setting is that of a private physician office or an outpatient clinic where 42 percent of the FM physicians practice. Primary care is the main service at the sites where FM physicians work. Nearly all of them (96.5 percent) reported that their practice sites mostly provide primary care. Many of those sites also have ARNPs and PAs on staff: 42 percent practice at sites with ARNPs and 45.9 percent with PAs. Most FM physicians work at sites that have a need for interpreter services (61.7 percent), although 10.4 percent of the FM physicians reported they work at sites where there is inadequate access to the needed interpreter services.

FM physicians have a long history of practice. They have practiced on average for 18 years and most of those years (15.3) were spent practicing in Washington. One fifth of the workforce is planning on retiring within the next five years. A typical work week of the FM physicians is filled with 44.7 hours on the job, 36 of which are in direct patient care. For nearly half (48.1 percent) of the FM physicians, their work schedule also extends beyond the 8-5 weekday hours. With an average panel of 1,670 patients per physician under their care, one fifth of whom were covered by Medicaid, their weekly workload includes 91.5 patient visits. Three quarters of the FM physicians are still accepting new patients, but among those accepting new patients, 28.6 percent are not accepting new Medicaid patients.

In working with Medicaid patients, FM physicians regard Medicaid's reimbursement rate as the most salient issue. More than half of them (51.9 percent) consider it as a major problem. Other salient factors influencing their practice in relation to Medicaid are acceptance of referrals by specialists, complexity of patients needs, and time spent on paperwork.

Appendix. Characteristics of Washington State's Family Medicine Physicians (N=2,735)

	%/Mean	C.I. (95%)
1. Physician Characteristics		
a. Age (mean)	48.9	48.3-49.5
b. Female (%)	42.0	39.3-44.7
c. Hispanic or Latino origin (%)	3.7	2.6-4.7
d. Race (%)*		
White	86.4	84.4-88.4
Black/African American	1.4	0.7-2.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	13.0	11.1-15.0
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.3	0.7-1.9
Other	2.0	1.2-2.8
e. Medical education (%)*		
M.D. degree	89.8	88.1-91.5
D.O. degree	10.3	8.6-12.0
Other	0.5	0.1-0.8
f. Place of medical education (%)		
Washington State	22.9	20.5-25.2
Another US state	66.6	63.9-69.2
A foreign country	10.5	8.8-12.3
g. Place of internship/residencies (%)*		
Washington State	48.2	45.5-51.0
A rural community	16.9	14.9-18.9
An inner-city community	29.1	26.6-31.6
A predominately minority community	15.6	13.6-17.6
Never had internships or residencies in Washington State, a rural community, an inner-city community, or a predominately minority community	24.3	22.0-26.7
h. Languages spoken for clinical purposes (%)		
English only	65.4	62.7-68.0
English and Spanish	18.8	16.7-20.9
English, Spanish, and other language(s)	3.3	2.3-4.3
English and other non-Spanish language(s)	12.5	10.7-14.3
i. Region of residence (%)		
Clark	4.1	3.0-5.3
East Balance	8.5	7.0-9.9
King	36.2	33.6-38.8
North Sound	7.3	6.0-8.7
Other Puget Sound Metro	8.6	7.1-10.1
Pierce	10.3	8.6-12.1
Snohomish	5.9	4.7-7.2
Spokane	7.4	6.0-8.8
West Balance	4.8	3.8-5.8
Yakima-TriCities	6.7	5.3-8.2

	%/Mean	C.I. (95%)
2. Primary Practice Site Characteristics		
a. Region (%)		
Clark	4.2	3.0-5.3
East Balance	8.7	7.3-10.2
King	34.7	32.1-37.3
North Sound	7.1	5.8-8.4
Other Puget Sound Metro	7.8	6.3-9.2
Pierce	10.7	9.0-12.5
Snohomish	7.6	6.2-9.0
Spokane	7	5.6-8.4
West Balance	5.3	1.2-6.4
Yakima-TriCities	6.9	5.5-8.3
b. Mostly providing primary care (%)	96.5	95.5-97.5
c. Type of practice (%)		
Private physician office/clinic	42.0	39.3-44.7
Hospital outpatient clinic	19.0	16.8-21.2
HMO medical center	11.6	9.8-13.3
Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC)	10.3	8.5-12.0
Certified Rural Health Clinic (RHC)	4.1	3.0-5.1
Other types of office/clinic	13.1	11.3-15.0
d. Mid-level Providers on Site*		
ARNPs (not CNM) (%)	41.8	39.1-44.5
PAs (%)	45.9	43.2-48.7
Licensed Midwives (%)	2.5	1.7-3.4
Certified Nurse Midwives (CNM-ARNP) (%)	5.5	4.2-6.7
e. Need interpreter services (%)	61.7	59.0-64.3
f. No adequate access to needed interpreter services (%)	10.4	8.8-12.1
3. Practice Characteristics		
a. Working at 2 or more sites (%)	22.1	19.8-24.4
b. Participating in provider network (%)	74.6	72.2-77.1
c. Years practicing in US (mean)	18.0	17.3-18.6
d. Years practicing in Washington (mean)	15.3	14.7-15.9
e. Plan to retire within next five years (%)	20.0	18.0-22.1
f. Hours of work in Washington in a typical week (mean)		
Direct patient care	35.6	34.7-36.5
Administration of clinical practice	5.5	5.1-5.9
Other physician activities	3.6	3.3-4.0
Total hours of work	44.7	43.8-45.6
g. Number of work weeks in 2010 (mean)	45.9	45.5-46.3
h. Worked a full week in last typical week of work (%)	70.5	68.1-73.0
i. Work time in FTE in 2010 (mean)	0.9	0.9-0.9
j. Portion of direct patient care in primary care		
Half or more	96.6	95.6-97.6
k. Work in early morning, evening, or weekend hours (%)	48.1	45.4-50.8

	%/Mean	C.I. (95%)
4. Patient Volume		
a. Average number of patients in 2010 (mean)	1698	1627-1769
b. Percent of patients covered by Medicaid (mean)	20.3	19.2-21.5
c. Accepting new patients (%)	74.8	72.5-77.2
d. Number of new patients to accept (mean)	431	398-464
e. Accepting no new Medicaid patients	28.6	25.8-31.3
f. Number of patient visits in last typical week (mean)		
In office and outpatient clinics	69.2	66.6-71.9
On hospital rounds	3.9	3.3-4.4
In nursing homes and patient homes	1.4	1.2-1.7
Via telephone consultation	9.4	8.1-10.7
Via email/other electronic consultation	7.5	6.6-8.4
Total patient visits seen	91.5	87.8-95.1
5. Reporting Factors Affecting Practice as Most Problematic (%)		
a. Medicaid*		
Time spent on paperwork	23.5	21.0-26.1
Waiting time for reimbursement	15.1	12.7-17.4
Reimbursement rate	51.9	48.7-55.1
Patient acceptance of treatment options	8.5	6.8-10.3
Length of patient visit	11.8	9.8-13.8
Acceptance of referrals by specialists	39.5	36.5-42.5
Complexity of patient needs	27.4	24.7-30.0
b. Commercial Plans*		
Time spent on paperwork	11.7	9.8-13.5
Waiting time for reimbursement	4.7	3.3-6.0
Reimbursement rate	5.8	4.4-7.3
Patient acceptance of treatment options	1.5	0.8-2.2
Length of patient visit	2.8	1.9-3.8
Acceptance of referrals by specialists	1.8	1.0-2.6
Complexity of patient needs	3.1	2.1-4.1

* Percentage estimates in the sub-categories are not mutually exclusive.

Note 1: For various reasons, survey respondents sometimes choose not to answer certain questions of a survey. Calculation of a specific estimate in this analysis excluded the survey records that have a response to the question of interest to the estimate.

Note 2: Item 3.e (Plan to retire within next five years) includes a small number of physicians already retired.

Note 3: The denominator for 2.f is all physicians, not just those working at sites in need of interpreter services.

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