

WASHINGTON STATE HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH PROJECT

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Profile of Washington State's OB/GYNs

By Wei Yen
The Health Care Research Group

Introduction

Obstetrics and gynecology physicians (OB/GYNs) provide care for women's reproductive health and for delivery of newborns. Until recently, there has been little information on characteristics and practice patterns of OB/GYNs practicing in Washington. The 2011 Washington State Physician Survey of Family Medicine, General Practice, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics, OB/GYN, and Geriatrics¹ provides a rare information source for such a purpose.² According to the survey, 571 OB/GYNs were practicing in Washington at the time of the survey (summer of 2011). This study presents analysis of the characteristics and practice patterns of the 571 OB/GYNs as represented by 265 survey respondents.

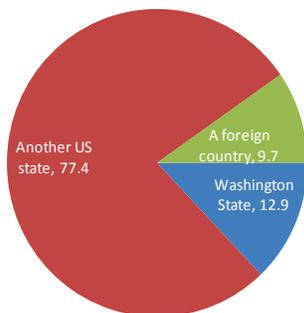
Physician Characteristics

An average OB/GYN in Washington in 2011 was about 50.4 years old. Female physicians accounted for 56.6 percent of the OB/GYNs. White was the largest race category for OB/GYNs at 86.6 percent. Asian and Pacific Islander was the second largest race category for 11.0 percent of the OB/GYNs. The share of Hispanic physicians was 1.7 percent.

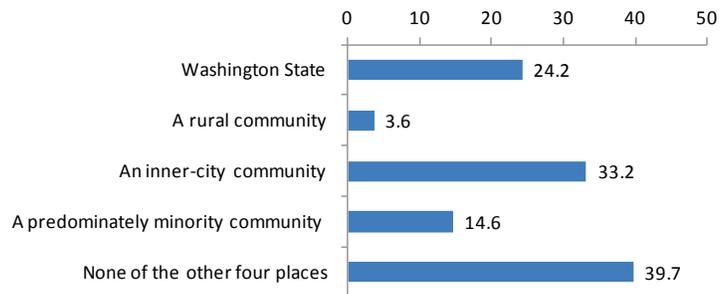
Approximately 94 percent of OB/GYNs reported having a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) degree with the rest reporting a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.) or some other degrees. Washington State's medical education institutions produced 12.9 percent of the OB/GYNs. The state relies heavily on "importing" OB/GYNs from other states – more than three fourths (77.4 percent) received their medical education in other states. Those physicians who received their medical education in foreign countries constituted 9.7 percent of all OB/GYNs.

About one-fourth (24 percent) of OB/GYNs did their residency or internship in Washington, four percent in a rural community, 33 percent in an inner-city community, and 15 percent in a predominantly minority community. Almost 40 percent, however, reported that they had not had residencies or internships in any of the above-mentioned settings.³

Place of Medical Education (%)
OB/GYNs, 2011



Place of Residency/Internship (%)
OB/GYNs, 2011



¹ Also known as the 2011 Washington State Primary Care Physician Survey.

² For more information about the survey, see

http://www.ofm.wa.gov/healthcare/deliverysystem/2011_PCP_survey_frequency_report.pdf.

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

Slightly over one-third of OB/GYNs (34.2 percent) could communicate with patients in more than one language for clinical purposes. The OB/GYNs' language combinations tabulated for this analysis show that 19.5 percent of them used English plus Spanish, 2.9 percent used English plus Spanish and other language(s), and 11.8 percent English plus other non-Spanish language(s).

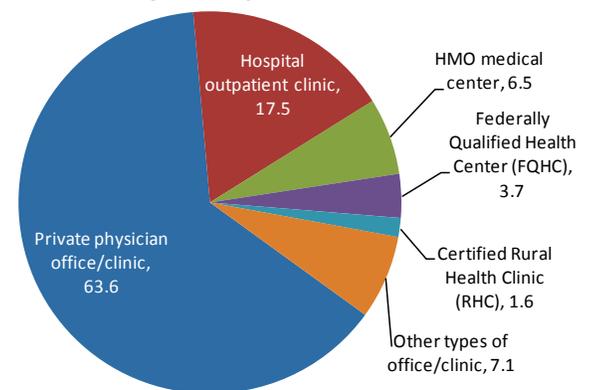
This analysis groups Washington State's counties into 10 regions, based on the county groupings used for the Washington State Population Survey⁴. According to these groupings, the urban counties of Clark, King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Spokane each form a region of their own and are named after the respective counties. 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 remaining counties form the East Balance region and the West Balance region with the Cascades as the dividing line. Using these region groupings, the largest share of the state's OB/GYNs lived in the King region in 2011 (46.8 percent).

Characteristics of Primary Practice Site

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

Using the same county groupings from above, King was again the region where the largest share of OB/GYNs had their primary practice sites (44.8 percent). One of the survey questions asked whether the physician's primary practice site mostly provided primary care. The results show that 47.2 percent of the OB/GYNs worked at such a site. The setting of the primary practice site that had the largest share of OB/GYNs was a private physician office or clinic (63.6 percent). It is followed by hospital outpatient clinics (17.5 percent), HMO medical centers (6.5 percent), Federally Qualified Health Centers (3.7 percent), and Certified Rural health Clinics (1.4 percent). Another 7.1 percent of OB/GYNs reported a primary practice site that was in none of the settings mentioned above.

**Type of Primary Practice Site (%)
OB/GYNs, 2011**



The survey also asked about four types of non-physician providers working at the physician's primary practice site. The four types are: Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioner or ARNP (not Certified Nurse Midwife), physician assistant or PA, Licensed Midwife, and Certified Nurse Midwife. The shares of OB/GYNs working at those sites were 43.3 percent, 20.8 percent, 2.9 percent, and 17 percent, respectively.

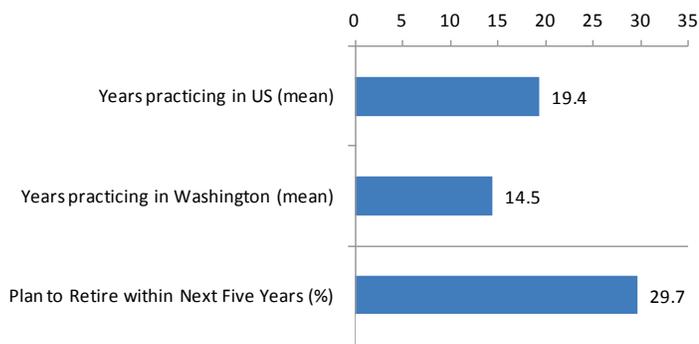
The majority of OB/GYNs (80 percent) worked at sites that had a need for interpreter services. However, the share of OB/GYNs working at sites that did not have adequate access to needed interpreter services was much smaller at 14.4 percent.

Practice Characteristics

OB/GYNs have had a long practice history, with an average of 19.4 years in U.S. and 14.5 years in Washington. The long history of practice is an indication that many of these physicians are nearing retirement. When asked when they plan to retire, 29.7 percent reported they planned to retire within the next five years.

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

Practice History, OB/GYNs, 2011



On average, OB/GYNs reported working 48.2 hours in a typical week with 39.8 of those hours in direct patient care. Administration of clinical practice took 4.8 hours and other physician activities 3.6 hours. In 2010, OB/GYNs spent an average of 45.5 weeks working. When each physician's work hours per week and number of weeks of work in 2010 were converted into full-time equivalencies, their work time amounted to 0.9 FTE per physician (1.0 FTE being the upper boundary). Many OB/GYNs had work hours that extended beyond the 8-5 weekday schedule. The share of OB/GYNs who provided care in early mornings, evenings, or weekends was 37.6 percent.

Other practice characteristics show that one fourth of OB/GYNs worked at two or more sites (26.3 percent); most of the OB/GYNs (75.9 percent) participated in provider networks; and roughly 44 percent spent about half or more of their direct patient hours in primary care.

Patient Workload

OB/GYNs reported that in 2010, they had about 1,580 patients per physician under their care. Their average share of patients covered by Medicaid was 24.9 percent. Nearly all OB/GYNs (95.8 percent) reported they were accepting new patients, although 21.0 percent of those accepting new patients reported they would accept no new Medicaid patients.

OB/GYNs received 94.8 patient visits in a typical work week, with 66.5 visits in offices or outpatient clinics, 11.4 on hospital rounds, 0.6 nursing home or patient home visits, 9.8 visits via telephone consultation, and 6.4 visits via 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 affect their practice with respect 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 OB/GYNs, with 56.3 percent reporting it as a major problem. The next most salient issue was "acceptance of referrals by specialists," reported by 28.9 percent of OB/GYNs as a major problem. With regard to commercial plans, the most salient issue was the "time spent on paperwork," considered as a major problem by 10.3 percent of the OB/GYNs, although an even larger share, 16.8 percent, reported it as a major problem with regard to Medicaid.

Summary

The average OB/GYN currently practicing in Washington is about 50 years old. They have practiced on average for 19.4 years and 14.5 of those years were spent in Washington. Nearly 30 percent of physicians in this specialty are planning to retire within the next 5 years.

More than half of Washington's OB/GYNs are females. Two racial groups, white and Asian/Pacific Islander, account for more than 95 percent of the OB/GYNs. Over 90 percent of the OB/GYNs have an M.D. degree. The majority received their medical education in other states (77.4 percent) or other countries (9.7 percent). While between 14.6 and 33.2 percent of the OB/GYNs completed their residency or internship in each of the following – in Washington, a rural community, or an inner-city community, 39.7 percent of OB/GYNs reported that they did their residency/internship in a place other than the above-mentioned places. Approximately one-third of the OB/GYNs are able to communicate bilingually or multilingually with patients. About 47 percent of the OB/GYNs reside in the King region and 45 percent also practice in King.

The most common practice site for OB/GYNs in Washington is a private physician office or clinic. Nearly two thirds of OB/GYNs work at such a setting. Traveling between practice sites is common for more than one-fourth of the OB/GYNs. Many (40 percent) work at sites that also hire ARNPs. Interpreter service need is prevalent at the sites where the OB/GYNs work. Roughly 80 percent of the OB/GYNs work at sites that need interpreter services. However, only 14 percent of the OB/GYNs work at sites that do not have adequate access to the needed interpreter services.

An OB/GYN's typical week is filled with 48 hours of work. The majority of their work hours (39.8 hours) are spent in direct patient care. For more than a third of the OB/GYNs (37.6 percent), the long hours extend beyond the 8-5 weekday schedule into early mornings, evenings, and weekends. In 2010, Washington's OB/GYNs worked an average of 46 weeks. The OB/GYNs have about 1,580 patients under each physician's care. One fourth of these patients are covered by Medicaid. Each week, OB/GYNs work with an average of 95 patient visits, most of which are patient visits to the offices or outpatient clinics (67 visits).

The self-reported data suggest that, for OB/GYNs, their patient load has not reached their capacity yet. Nearly all OB/GYNs (95.8 percent) reported that they are still accepting new patients, although one fifth reported that they are not accepting any new Medicaid patients. In working with Medicaid patients, OB/GYNs consider Medicaid's reimbursement rate as the most salient issue - more than half of them consider it as a major problem. Other factors that are considered major problems with regard to Medicaid by sizeable shares of the OB/GYNs include: acceptance of referrals by specialists, complexity of patients needs, waiting time for reimbursement, and time spent on paperwork.

Appendix. Characteristics of Washington State's OB/GYNs (N=571)

	%/Mean	C.I. (95%)
1. Physician Characteristics		
a. Age (mean)	50.4	49.0-51.8
b. Female (%)	56.6	50.6-62.6
c. Hispanic or Latino origin (%)	1.7	0.2-3.2
d. Race (%)*		
White	86.6	82.3-90.8
Black/African American	2.2	0.4-4.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	11.0	7.1-14.9
American Indian/Alaska Native	3.2	0.9-5.4
Other	3.6	1.3-6.0
e. Medical Education (%)*		
M.D. degree	93.7	90.6-96.8
D.O. degree	6.3	3.2-9.4
Other	0.3	0-0.8
f. Place of medical education (%)		
Washington State	12.9	8.8-17.4
Another US state	77.4	71.9-82.9
A foreign country	9.7	5.7-12.3
g. Place of internship/residencies (%)*		
Washington State	24.2	18.7-29.7
A rural community	3.6	1.2-6.0
An inner-city community	33.2	27.4-39.0
A predominately minority community	14.6	10.3-18.9
Never had internships or residencies in Washington State, a rural community, an inner-city community, or a predominately minority community	39.7	33.7-45.8
h. Languages spoken for clinical purposes (%)		
English only	65.8	59.9-71.7
English and Spanish	19.5	14.6-24.4
English, Spanish, and other language(s)	2.9	0.7-5.1
English and other non-Spanish language(s)	11.8	7.8-15.8
i. Region of residence (%)		
Clark	6.9	3.7-10.1
East Balance	4.4	2.1-6.7
King	46.8	40.7-52.9
North Sound	6.0	3.3-8.7
Other Puget Sound Metro	4.2	1.9-6.4
Pierce	12.1	8.1-16.1
Snohomish	3.3	0.9-5.5
Spokane	6.0	3.1-8.9
West Balance	2.7	0.8-4.6
Yakima-TriCities	7.6	4.3-11.0

	%/Mean	C.I. (95%)
2. Primary Practice Site Characteristics		
a. Region (%)		
Clark	7.3	4.0-10.5
East Balance	3.7	1.6-5.7
King	44.8	38.7-51.0
North Sound	6.0	3.2-8.7
Other Puget Sound Metro	4.2	1.9-6.4
Pierce	13.1	9.0-17.3
Snohomish	4.0	1.5-6.4
Spokane	7.1	4.0-10.2
West Balance	2.3	0.6-4.1
Yakima-TriCities	7.6	4.3-10.9
b. Mostly providing primary care (%)	47.2	41.0-53.4
c. Type of practice (%)		
Private physician office/clinic	63.6	57.6-69.6
Hospital outpatient clinic	17.5	12.7-22.2
HMO medical center	6.5	3.4-9.7
Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC)	3.7	1.3-6.1
Certified Rural Health Clinic (RHC)	1.6	0-3.3
Other types of office/clinic	7.1	4.0-10.3
d. Mid-level providers on site*		
ARNPs (not CNM) (%)	43.3	37.1-49.6
PAs (%)	20.8	15.6-25.9
Licensed Midwives (%)	2.9	0.8-5.1
Certified Nurse Midwives (CNM-ARNP) (%)	17.0	12.2-21.7
e. Need interpreter services (%)	78.8	73.9-83.7
f. No adequate access to needed interpreter services (%)	14.4	10.1-18.7
3. Practice Characteristics		
a. Working at 2 or more sites (%)	26.3	20.9-31.8
b. Participating in provider network (%)	75.9	70.5-81.3
c. Years practicing in US (mean)	19.4	18.0-20.8
d. Years practicing in Washington (mean)	14.5	13.2-15.7
e. Plan to retire within next five years (%)	29.7	24.2-35.1
f. Hours of work in Washington in a typical week (mean)		
Direct patient care	39.8	37.7-41.9
Administration of clinical practice	4.8	4.0-5.6
Other physician activities	3.6	3.0-4.2
Total hours of work	48.2	45.8-50.6
g. Number of work weeks in 2010 (mean)	45.4	44.4-46.3
h. Worked a full week in last typical week of work (%)	77.1	72.0-82.1
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	43.5	37.3-49.6
k. Work in early morning, evening, or weekend hours (%)	37.6	31.6-43.6

	%/Mean	C.I. (95%)
4. Patient Volume		
a. Average number of patients in 2010 (mean)	1581	1396-1766
b. Percent of patients covered by Medicaid (mean)	24.9	22.2-27.6
c. Accepting new patients (%)	95.8	93.4-98.3
d. Number of new patients to accept (mean)	409.0	362-456
e. Accepting no new Medicaid patients	21.0	15.9-26.1
f. Number of patient visits in last typical week (mean)		
In office and outpatient clinics	66.5	61.1-71.9
On hospital rounds	11.4	7.8-15.0
In nursing homes and patient homes	0.6	0.3-1.0
Via telephone consultation	9.8	6.2-13.5
Via email/other electronic consultation	6.4	2.8-10.1
Total patient visits seen	94.8	80.2-109.4
5. Reporting Factors Affecting Practice as Most Problematic (%)		
a. Medicaid*		
Time spent on paperwork	16.8	11.6-22.1
Waiting time for reimbursement	22.0	16.1-27.9
Reimbursement rate	56.3	49.4-63.3
Patient acceptance of treatment options	3.7	1.1-6.2
Length of patient visit	7.6	4.0-11.3
Acceptance of referrals by specialists	28.9	22.8-35.1
Complexity of patient needs	25.0	19.3-30.7
b. Commercial Plans*		
Time spent on paperwork	10.3	6.1-14.6
Waiting time for reimbursement	4.0	1.3-6.8
Reimbursement rate	7.1	3.6-10.6
Patient acceptance of treatment options	0.0	0.0-0.0
Length of patient visit	0.6	0.0-1.8
Acceptance of referrals by specialists	2.6	0.5-4.7
Complexity of patient needs	1.0	0.0-2.4

* 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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