

COGME Recommends Expansion of Physician Workforce

After an extended discussion and some minor modifications, the Council on Graduate Medical Education (COGME) July 28 endorsed the "Physician Workforce Policy Guidelines for the U.S. for 2000 - 2020." The report concludes that the nation is likely to face a significant shortage of physicians over the next 15 years and recommends an increase in the number of new physicians being educated and trained in the US. This marks a significant change from earlier COGME reports and is the first to call for an increase in US medical school capacity. COGME also is no longer recommending that 50 percent of new physicians be in generalist specialties but rather that the distribution by specialty should be determined by marketplace demand. The report also strongly endorses the need for additional data collection and research to guide decisions on the size and mix of the physician workforce.

Using several models and a variety of assumptions, the report presents the results of alternative scenarios that would impact on future supply, demand and need. Under most scenarios the nation will be facing a shortage of physicians by 2020. The Council endorsed the following key recommendations in order to address the likely shortage:

Increase the number of new physicians entering the system from 24,000 to 27,000 per year with no specific target for generalists and non-generalists;

Expand US medical school enrollment by 3,000 (15 percent) per year by 2015;

Expand funding under Medicare for additional GME slots to accommodate the increase in US medical graduates;

Promote efforts to improve productivity, such as information systems and systems redesign;

Continue to study, track, and regularly assess the nation's physician workforce needs; and

Expand support for programs that address the geographic and specialty mal-distribution, address needs in under-served areas, and promote increased physician diversity.

The recommended increase in medical school production is not expected to meet all of the increase in demand expected by 2020; it is hoped that improvements in productivity and changes in the delivery system will help balance supply and demand. Further, the report recognizes the many uncertainties in forecasting and in the physician marketplace and therefore recommends a dynamic system to track physician workforce needs and to adjust the education and training to the nation's evolving needs.


The report was prepared by Edward Salsberg, director of the AAMC Center for Workforce Studies, and former executive director of the Center for Health Workforce Studies at the School of Public Health at the University of Albany, State University of New York (SUNY). The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) expects to publish and disseminate the report in the next few months as the 16th COGME report.

A report by Rhonda Ray, Ph.D., was also approved by the Council and will be published as the 17th COGME report. The report, "Update on Minorities in Medicine," makes recommendations in three areas: strengthening the pipeline to medical school; strengthening upstream efforts in medical training; and ensuring cultural competence in medicine. Specific recommendations focus on programmatic and research efforts to increase racial and ethnic diversity in medical schools, residency programs, and across specialties. Recommendations also address programs and research to encourage more physicians to practice in underserved areas, strategies for assessing and reinforcing commitment by academic medical centers to provide care to underserved populations, and efforts to identify key cultural-competence objectives, promote cultural-competence training, and determine the connection between such training and patient outcomes.

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