



Prescription for Change: Tackling Indiana's Primary Care Physician Shortage

Anthony M. Stultz, B.S.

Marian University College of Osteopathic Medicine
3200 Cold Spring Rd, Indianapolis, IN 46222

What's a Primary Care Physician?

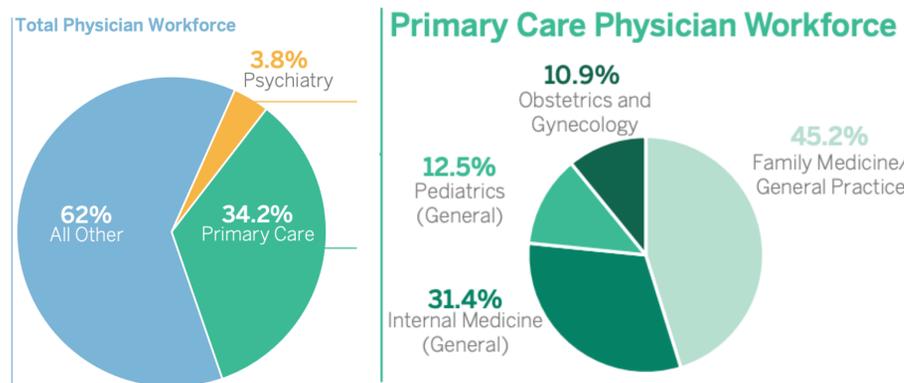
A primary care physician is a field of doctors that play a very active role in the patient's lifestyle and well-being. Primary care doctors are the main point of care for their patients, and they provide care for preventing, treating, and curing for both acute and chronic illnesses. They value the mind, body, and spirit of the patient and look at the patient as a whole, rather than only focusing on one area of patient's health.

There are five main types of Primary Care Physicians:

- Family Medicine Physicians
- Internal Medicine Physicians
- Obstetrics and Gynecology (OB-GYNs)
- Pediatricians
- Geriatrics

Today's Findings

In Indiana, other specialties dominant the physician workforces. Primary care physicians only take up 34.2% of the workforce. In the Primary Care Physician workforce, 45.2% are Family Medicine Physicians. Of that percentage, less than half see Geriatric patients (patients >65 years old). Obstetrics and Gynecology make up the smallest percentage of practicing Primary Care Physicians. Pediatrics also makes up a significantly small percentage of primary care physicians in the workforce.



Introduction

In the United States, one of the biggest issues that every state is experiencing is the shortage in doctors. Primary Care Physicians make up a huge percentage of the shortage in doctors. The Midwest took a huge hit by this shortage, especially in rural Indiana. In Indiana today, there are approximately 3,900 primary care physicians. Most primary care physicians are located more towards bigger cities such as Indianapolis, but due to the high demand for primary care physicians, it is difficult to see a primary care doctor. According to pulse today, a primary care physician sees on average more than 25 patients a day and it is believed to increase if this shortage is not addressed in the next decade.



Solution to the Problem

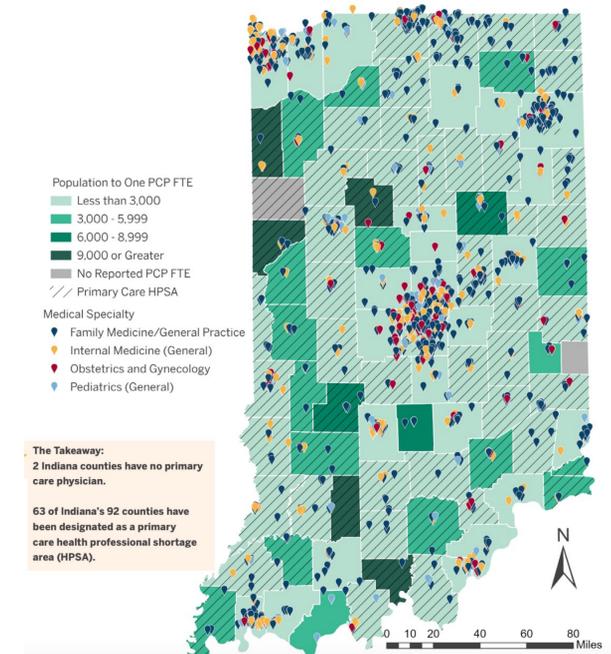
Recently, the medical schools in Indiana are responding to the shortage. Medical schools are adjusting part of their curriculum to emphasize primary care. Adjusting their curriculum allows medical students to get more exposure to primary care. Indiana University School of Medicine have introduced rural health programs, such as in Terre Haute, to help areas that need primary care. Marian University College of Osteopathic Medicine has implemented scholarships that students could receive while being in the D.O. program if they have a strong desire to go into primary care. This resolves medical students' problem with excessive amount of student loan debt.

Additional solutions for the shortage in primary care physicians could vary depending on the type of physician:

- Increase the use of telemedicine
- Student loan forgiveness
- Increase physician funding
- Increase awareness of all the benefits of being the direct point of care for patients

Who is Affected?

In Indiana today, all parts are struggling with the shortage, especially in the rural parts. Two counties in Indiana are currently experiencing the greatest affected by the shortage in primary care doctors. Union county, located southeast of Indianapolis and on the border of Ohio, are forced to have to go to neighboring counties or go into Ohio for medical services. Another country greatly affected is Benton county, located northwest of Indianapolis and on the border of Illinois. Citizens in this county must resort to neighboring counties in Indiana and Illinois for medical services by a primary care physician. The absence of primary care doctors in Indiana, especially in these counties, lead to an increase in the shortage of primary care physicians in all the Midwest.



References



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