

Study sees doctor shortage

By Christine McConville | Monday, October 6, 2008 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Business & Markets

When it comes to specialized medicine, patient demand outstrips supply, according to the Massachusetts Medical Society's latest review of the physician work force.

The study shows that in 12 different medical fields - ranging from oncology to family medicine - Massachusetts doesn't have enough doctors to meet the public's growing needs.

And this, coupled with the success of the state's health-care reform act, which led to 440,000 more Massachusetts residents having insurance, means more people will have to wait longer for certain medical care.

"The success of health care reform in insuring hundreds of thousands more people is a great step forward," said medical society president Bruce Auerbach. "But it has put enormous pressure on primary care, and we now know that insurance without access to care will not result in true health care reform and that universal coverage does not equal universal access."

The data comes from the medical society's annual work-force survey.

For starters, it shows a shortage of physicians who practice internal medicine, family medicine, oncology, neurology, dermatology, emergency medicine, general surgery, neurosurgery, orthopedics, psychiatry, urology and vascular surgery.

Auerbach said some of the shortages are due to the gap between the cost of living in Massachusetts, and what insurance companies and the government will pay for certain medical procedures.

There are also widespread fears of being sued.

The end result is patients having to wait longer for medical care. The study shows that for internal medicine, the average wait is 50 days, while for family medicine the average wait is 36 days.

Although the study shows that 88 percent of Massachusetts residents are satisfied with the health care they received last year, Auerbach said the study points to areas for improvement.

"Decreasing administrative burdens, fixing our liability system, and reducing barriers to recruitment and retention, such as lowering medical school debt, are just a few of the immediate steps we can take now to improve the practice environment," he said.

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