



National Survey Suggests U.S. May Not Be Facing a Doctor Shortage After All

Houston – November 12, 2019 – A nationwide survey by the [Texas Medical Center Health Policy Institute](#) – housed within the largest medical center in the world – suggests the much-discussed physician shortage facing the U.S. may not be as severe as once thought.

The survey found that only 19 percent of consumers reported difficulty scheduling a new patient visit with a primary care physician, and just 15 percent had trouble scheduling a new visit with a specialist. Similar rates had trouble scheduling follow-up appointments.

“The best way to tell if we have a doctor shortage is by asking patients whether they can easily get an appointment,” said Arthur “Tim” Garson Jr., M.D., director of the Texas Medical Center Health Policy Institute in Houston. “For now, they overwhelmingly say ‘yes.’”

The changing nature of health care delivery

“[The Nation’s Pulse: The Texas Medical Center’s Consumer & Physician Surveys](#)” queried 2,000 consumers and 750 physicians across all 50 states. National firm Lumina conducted the survey on behalf of the Texas Medical Center.

Despite positive findings from patients, however, physicians overwhelmingly believe there is a looming shortage of doctors facing the country in the future. About 90 percent of primary care physicians predict a shortage in their field within five years, while 78 percent of specialists predict a shortage of specialist physicians. The American Association of Medical Colleges [predicts](#) a shortage of 46,900 to 121,900 physicians by 2032.

The survey offers solutions to a possible physician shortage if, in fact, one comes to fruition. Nearly three-quarters of physicians believe they will ultimately see fewer patients, with nurse practitioners taking on more patients. The findings indicate a widespread belief that nurse practitioners will shoulder increasing responsibility for the growing health care needs of the country. Importantly, consumers are accepting of this possibility. When asked about an initial visit, six in 10 consumers said they would be willing to see a nurse practitioner instead of their primary care physician, and approximately half would see a nurse practitioner in lieu of a specialist.

The survey highlights another critical way to prevent a possible doctor shortage: keeping physicians in the workforce. Of doctors planning to retire in the next five years, 75 percent say they would consider postponing their plans if presented with options that would make continuing to practice medicine more attractive.

“The number one change in the practice of medicine that would keep them from retiring? More time with each patient,” Garson said.

Consumers expect health care reform soon

As the presidential race continues to focus on candidates' plans for health care, the survey reveals striking optimism from voters. About two-thirds of both physicians and consumers – including the majority of both Democratic and Republican voters – say that eventually, everyone in the U.S. will have health care coverage. Some see this happening quite soon. About 45 percent of consumers believe everyone in the U.S. will have health care coverage within five years. However, just 28 percent of doctors shared the expectation of such rapid reform.

“Increasingly, voters see expanded health care coverage not just as a political talking point but as something that is poised to become a reality,” Garson said. “However, physicians offer an important reality check: given the political climate, this may not happen any time soon.”

Just over half of consumers (51 percent) also stated that they were willing to pay more for health care to ensure that everybody in the U.S. has access to insurance. The Texas Medical Center's analysis of responses determined that collectively, Americans are willing to spend an additional \$24.5 billion on health care to ensure greater coverage for others.

Cost of health care

Consumers were also asked to identify their top priorities for the health care system. Unsurprisingly, as health care costs continue to rise, consumers identified affordability as their top priority. Physicians, meanwhile, pointed to health care quality as their priority, likely because they do not directly deal with billing the way that patients do.

Consumers and physicians both agreed that the most likely way of reducing health care costs is for patients to take better care of themselves. The majority of consumers and physicians, 94 and 91 percent respectively, agree taking better care of themselves is the best way to reduce the cost of health care.

Medicaid and Trump

Finally, the survey asked consumers who plan to vote for President Donald Trump in the 2020 election how his position on Medicaid would affect their vote. About 16 percent of Trump supporters said they won't vote for Trump in 2020 if he proposes reducing Medicaid funding. Previously, the president supported legislation that would have done this.

That figure represents more than 10 million votes, based on Trump's vote total in the 2016 election. The finding suggests that if Trump repeats support for a Medicaid cut, he could risk alienating a significant portion of his base and jeopardize his hopes for re-election.

For more details on the survey please visit <http://www.tmcnationspulse.org/>.

About Texas Medical Center

The largest medical complex in the world, the Texas Medical Center is internationally recognized and home to many of the nation's best hospitals, physicians, educational institutions, researchers, and the largest concentration of life-sciences experts. TMC's vision of collaborative research is being brought to life through five institutes that build on TMC's strengths in Genomics, Regenerative Medicine, Innovation, Clinical Research and Health Policy. Learn more at www.tmc.edu.

About the TMC Health Policy Institute

The TMC Health Policy Institute was established to inform, define and lead health policy with the goal of developing the most effective solutions to improve the health of diverse populations around the globe. By

driving innovative, evidence-based health policy initiatives across the Texas Medical Center's 61 member institutions, the TMC Health Policy Institute addresses fundamental health policy issues important to Houston, the state and the nation including public health advocacy, health care delivery models, health care funding, patient quality outcomes, patient safety and health ethics. Learn more at tmc.edu/health-policy.

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