

# The Need For Healthcare Reform and The Shortage of Primary Care Physicians



Healthcare and healthcare reform have become hot topics throughout the US. For the 43.6 million people under age 65 without insurance<sup>1</sup>, this is a welcome discussion for which they have been waiting.

With more than 215 million visits annually, and doctor shortage that could potentially reach 124,400 by 2025<sup>2</sup>, healthcare providers may not as eager to see their already burdened facilities open to more people. In fact, our doctor shortage is so great, that we would need to increase the number of doctors trained annually by 3,000 - 10,000 in order to keep up. At current rates, the next 15 years will only create 150,000 home-trained doctors<sup>3</sup>.

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## What is Healthcare Reform?

Healthcare reform is when there is a significant change to the method of delivery of health services. This typically comes from sort of government intervention. There are several goals of healthcare reform, but the main three are improving the quality of healthcare, decreasing the cost of healthcare, and making healthcare more accessible to citizens.

## Why is There a Primary Care Shortage?

In the 1960s and 1970s, the government helped fund residencies through Medicare, fearing a doctor and primary-care provider shortage. The program was so successful that those doctors now make up approximately 1/3 of the profession. Unfortunately, many of them are now ready to retire.

To compound the problem, the US population is expected to increase by an estimated 18 percent over the next decade, with the population of individuals over the age of 65

increasing by a whopping 54%. As a result, the country will not only require healthcare for a greater number of individuals, but also will require more care per person, more involved treatments, and longer hospital stays as a result of the aging population.

Additionally, societal changes must now be dealt with. The Council on Graduate Medical Education says doctors are now working less, with a lighter patient load, and trading patient care for more research time. Combine this with an uneven distribution of medical staff from state to state, and a healthcare shortage seems imminent.

Representing 76 percent of all jobs in the healthcare industry<sup>4</sup>, doctors and other healthcare professionals pose the greatest shortage. Those positions are also the most difficult to staff due to the extensive education required for them. However, hospitals and other healthcare facilities have some options available to help fill the gaps.

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## Health Careers Mentorship Program

Internships and nurturing relationships with upcoming physicians can be a powerful way to encourage students to practice in the area and stay in medicine. Establishing a leadership program is a proven method to generate student interest and commitment to a practicing area. Experienced physicians, and even communities, may want to consider 'sponsoring' students and encouraging others to get their medical degrees in exchange for practicing in the area.

## Improve Work Efficiency

While shuffling paper might only seem to take seconds, it can consume a significant amount of time each day. When you consider the costs in salary and benefits for doctors, nurses, and other staff members, these losses can translate into millions of dollars per year.

By improving the efficiency of the system and delegating menial tasks, doctors and primary care providers can devote more time to patient care and facilities will reduce overall doctor staffing requirements.

## Education, New Methods, and Technology

Research, teaching new techniques, and owning the latest technology often requires large capital expenditure, but these things can also have significant returns that make them a worthwhile investment. Not only can they improve patient care and lower hospital stay times, but they can also reduce the number of total resources required per case, saving you a great deal more in the

long term. Laparoscopic surgeries are a great example of this.

Investment in new techniques and technologies shouldn't be limited to medicine, however. Rural areas often struggle to raise capital for software and IT enhancements, but greatly reduce the amount of time lost when dealing with patient records, appointments and other aspects of patient care once acquired<sup>5</sup>.

## Consider Other Health Professionals

Physician assistants and nurse practitioners may not be fully qualified physicians, but they are still excellent solutions for dealing with physician shortages. Use these professionals to write prescriptions, look at broken bones, and deal with minor cases, while saving the physician's time for serious cases, surgeries, and procedures that nurse practitioners and physician assistants are not qualified to handle. This distributes the work more evenly and allows doctors to see more patients while devoting time where it is truly needed.

## Developing a Hospitalist Programs

Weekends and on-call shifts can be the most difficult to staff. To deal with these gaps and ease the strain on regular staff, consider setting up a hospitalist program. A hospitalist program brings in highly trained doctors and medical professionals for the hours and weekends that facilities need the extra help most, as a supplement to the primary physician staff.

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Hospitalist programs allow your staff a healthy work-life balance and reduce burnout, while adding to your facility's high level of ethics and expertise. As a result, your facility will more easily attract top talent, improve retention rates, and reduce the time and money spent on recruiting. With a quality staffing firm, you won't even need to worry about scheduling.

## Healthcare Staffing Firms

Whether it's a temporary shortage or a long-term problem, healthcare staffing agencies provide access to top radiologists, psychiatrists, physicians, pediatricians, nurse practitioners, internal medicine specialists, and other healthcare professionals with a simple phone call. In addition, top firms help with the hiring process by screening candidates, leaving a list of nothing but the most qualified applicants. This further lowers facility costs as a result of wide-ranging benefits, while eliminating the stresses and hassles of recruiting staff.

No matter the staffing issue, Soliant Health can help. Contact Soliant now to learn more and find out how we can help with all your healthcare staffing needs. accomplish this is by having your own relief workers or hiring from a reputable and reliable healthcare staffing agency.

Contact Soliant to find out more about staffing, hospitalist programs, and other contingent solutions to burnout and declining employee engagement.

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

2 Primary-Care Doctor Shortage May Undermine Health Reform Efforts, Washington Post, June 20, 2009

3 Medical Schools Can't Keep Up, Wall Street Journal, April 12, 2010

4 Career Guide to Industries, 2010-2011 Edition, Bureau of Labor Statistics

5 Small and Rural IT Challenges, Hospitals & Health Networks