



## News Release

For immediate release

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### **Growth Spurt for NC Docs**

After only a small expansion last year, the physician workforce in North Carolina experienced the largest growth rate in twelve years. While the increase for all physicians was strong, the number of primary care physicians grew at an even faster clip, its highest rate in a decade.

According to recently released data from the North Carolina Health Professions Data System at UNC Chapel Hill, overall physician supply grew by 4.3%, and the number of primary care physicians increased by 4.9%. This is the third year of steady growth in primary care.

General internal medicine grew the fastest among primary care specialties with a 7.6% jump in supply. This growth in primary care providers in North Carolina comes during a time of increasing national attention over physician supply and the potential for health reform legislation to increase the number of insured people. More insured people are likely to demand more physician services.

Dr. Erin Fraher, Director of the Health Professions Data System is cautiously optimistic. “We are certainly seeing increases in physicians reporting a primary care specialty, but the real question is whether or not these physicians are truly providing primary care services.

“When we analyzed the data, we found that primary care physicians in North Carolina report spending about 75% of their total clinical care hours in primary care, and that’s good news for our patient population. Our analysis also showed that specialist physicians report spending about one-quarter of their time in primary care. Other health care providers including Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants, among others, also provide a large proportion of primary care in the State.”

Fraher believes that increases in primary care physician numbers should be interpreted with caution because determining the actual quantity of primary care services North Carolina citizens are receiving is more complex than simply monitoring changes in the numbers of primary care doctors.

When compared to national figures, North Carolina had 9.4 primary care physicians per 10,000 population in 2010 compared to the 2009 US ratio of 8.4. In 2010, all but one county in North Carolina had at least one primary care physician practicing in the county.

Growing and aging populations, as well as increased insurance coverage are expected to increase the demand for healthcare services. Data from the Association of American Medical Colleges<sup>1</sup> (AAMC) show that the current shortage of physicians across all specialties is expected to quadruple between now and 2015, the year after elements of health reform are scheduled to take place.

Efforts are underway to meet the increased demand for physicians and other healthcare providers. Nationally, educational programs and loan repayment programs, such as the National Health Service Corps, are being expanded. In North Carolina, new training programs are being developed. UNC Chapel Hill is partnering with Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte and Mission Hospitals in Asheville to expand their medical school enrollment, and is expanding their pharmacy program to Asheville as well. Campbell University is starting their first class of physician assistants in 2011 and is moving forward with plans to open a school of osteopathy in 2013. Elon University will begin enrolling students in a new PA program in January 2013. High Point University has developed a new school of health sciences and is planning programs to begin training physical therapists, PAs and pharmacists starting in 2014.

Further information and additional data on the supply of health professionals are available from the North Carolina Health Professions Data System at [www.shepscenter.unc.edu/hp](http://www.shepscenter.unc.edu/hp).

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<sup>1</sup> AAMC Releases New Physician Shortage Estimates Post-Reform. News Alert, September 30, 2010. Accessed 10/26/10 at <http://www.aamc.org/newsroom/pressrel/2010/100930.htm>.