



User's Guide to the NC Health Professions Data System

The North Carolina Health Professions Data System includes the following licensed professionals:

Certified Nurse Midwives	Nurse practitioners	Physical therapists
Chiropractors	Optometrists	Physical therapist assistants
Dentists	Pharmacists	Physician assistants
Dental hygienists	Podiatrists	Registered nurses
Doctors of medicine and osteopathy	Psychologists	Respiratory therapists
Licensed practical nurses	Psychological associates	

Objectives: The purpose of this User's Guide is to provide the individual or organization requesting data with more detailed information about data contained in the North Carolina Health Professions Data System (HPDS). This guide also seeks to explain some of the data limitations and caveats of the HPDS data. Additional data limitations and definitions specific to particular years are available in the front pages of the North Carolina Health Professions Data Book or on the website (www.shepscenter.unc.edu/hp).

Where Do the Data Come From? The data are obtained from the respective licensing boards and at all times remain the property of the boards. The Sheps Center audits, cleans and tabulates the data and reports the data for health policy and research. Due to the confidential nature of the licensure data, some data requests may require the prior written approval of the appropriate licensing board.

Data Limitations and Caveats: The North Carolina Health Professions Data System is one of the nation's most comprehensive health professions database and one of the few continuously maintained. The database however, has several data limitations and caveats that are important to recognize when using the data. These include:

1. Self-reported – the data are self-reported health professionals to the respective licensing boards at the time of initial license or renewal. The licensure files undergo several audits; however each record is not individually verified with the health professional.
2. Effective date - The data reported in the HPDS Data Books and in provided through data requests are effective as of October of the respective year. The data depict a cross-sectional snapshot of health professionals in practice, but is also dependent on the timing of the licensure or renewal. The data are not updated to reflect changes in supply, distribution or practice status of health professionals throughout the year and therefore, should not be used for point-in-time verification.
3. Definition of active - HPDS defines health professionals as active if a health professional indicated on their registration renewal form that they were working in North Carolina and were actively engaged in the profession. Active status may include administrators, researchers and educators who are active in the profession but not engaged in direct patient care. In addition, active status is assigned to individuals

who are newly licensed professionals, who at the time of licensure have not secured employment in their profession.

4. Address Used for County Location – Health care professionals are assigned to their self-designated primary practice location county if they are active and to their mailing address county if they are active and their primary practice location is unknown. For physicians, county location is based on zip-code; for all others, this is based on self-designated county.

Special note regarding the physician file - The licensing and renewal process with the North Carolina Medical Board allows for physicians to report up to three addresses (primary practice, business and home). Physicians are assigned to their self-designated primary practice location county (based on zip code). If primary practice location is unknown (not reported), then they are assigned to their self-designated business address county (based on zip code). If both primary practice location and business address location is unknown (not reported), then they are assigned to their self-designated home address (based on zip code). Because of missing/unreported data, physicians may be assigned to a county (from a business or home address) that does not necessarily reflect actual practice location. *Example: A physician primarily practices in Pender County, has a business address in New Hanover County and lives in Onslow County. If this physician renews his/her license and fails to indicate primary practice or business location, HPDS staff would default to home address (Onslow County) when assigning this physician to a county.*

5. Federal / Non-federal Status (physician file only) – Physicians are asked to report whether or not they are a Federal physician (e.g. their primary employer is the Federal government). Federal physicians practicing in government facilities are not required to be licensed by the NC Medical Board, however some physicians opt to obtain licensure and these individuals do appear in the HPDS database. Physicians who are employed by the Federal government and who also provide care in private practice would be counted as a Federal physician. *Since 2003, federal status has been verified against primary practice city. Physicians who indicate non-federal status but who indicate primary practice location on one of North Carolina's military installations, will be re-coded as a federal provider (Camp Lejeune, Cherry Point, New River, Fort Bragg, Seymour Johnson or Pope).*
6. Cross-County Zip Codes (physician file only) – A few zip codes in North Carolina cross multiple counties (zip code 28584 for example, which covers Swansboro (in Onslow County) and Cape Carteret and Cedar Point (in Carteret County). When HPDS staff assign physicians to a county, software utilized defaults to the county which contains the "center of the zip code." For zip code 28584, the "center" is located in Swansboro (Onslow County). This may have resulted in physicians who indicated a location in Cape Carteret or Cedar Point, being assigned to Onslow County instead of Carteret County. Beginning in 2003, towns and counties of problematic (cross-county) zip codes will be verified.

For more information on the North Carolina Health Professions Data System contact:

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