Part-Time Practice: Demographic and Medical Practice Characteristics

Part-time work schedules are gaining acceptance in medicine and the number of physicians who choose to work part-time is increasing. However, little is known about the work life of part-time physicians. In order to better understand the impact of part-time practice on the pediatric workforce in the United States, we conducted a focused analysis of the part-time pediatricians who completed the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Committee on Pediatric Workforce’s (COPW) State Pediatrician Workforce Survey.

Key Findings

The survey was completed by 8,867 pediatricians. There were 891 respondents who reported that they were currently working part-time. The part-time pediatricians were significantly more likely to be providing primary care services than the full-time pediatricians (p<0.001) and reported spending significantly more of their professional time providing direct patient care and less time on administration and research than full-time pediatricians (p<0.001). There was no significant difference in the proportion of time spent in teaching and precepting. Part-time pediatricians were more likely to be working in an ambulatory setting and less likely to be working in a hospital setting (p<0.001). Significantly fewer part-time pediatricians reported working in academic medicine (26% vs. 39%, p<0.001) and these part-time academic pediatricians were significantly less likely to be on a tenure track than the full-time pediatricians (14% vs. 24%, p<0.01). There was no difference in reported appointment availability between part-time and full-time pediatricians. Eighty percent of the part-time pediatricians (n=684) were women whereas 53% of the full-time pediatricians (n=2,975) were women (p<0.001). The age distribution of the part-time pediatricians was significantly different from the full-time pediatricians (p<0.001) most notably in the over-representation of pediatricians over age 65 years in the part-time group. The anticipated duration of their part-time work varied significantly by physician age and approximately 31% of the part-time pediatricians plan to continue to work part-time for > 10 years.

Anticipated duration of part-time work among pediatricians currently working part-time by gender

Conclusions

This analysis of the AAP COPW State Pediatrician Survey data on part-time pediatricians expands our understanding of the medical practices of part-time pediatricians in the US. Our survey demonstrates that part-time pediatricians are most likely to be providing primary care services in an ambulatory setting in an urban community. They spend a significantly greater portion of their time providing direct patient care than full-time pediatricians and a smaller portion of their time on health care administration and research. They are less likely to be men except in older age groups. They are also less likely to work in a hospital setting or in academic medicine. Our findings suggest that many younger pediatricians are planning to continue to work part-time for much of their medical career and that among older pediatricians, part-time practice may be a transitional career prior to retirement.

Policy & Implications

These findings have important implications for projecting the number of pediatricians needed to assure that all children have access to care in the US. The percentage of pediatricians working part-time, their practice locations and types of practice must be factored into our projections of the number of pediatricians our nation needs to be able to provide appropriate pediatric care, conduct pediatric research and train the future pediatric workforce. We can no longer simply count the number of active US pediatricians to determine if our pediatrician workforce is sufficient to meet the health care needs of our children since so many pediatricians are currently working part-time.

Limitations

Recipients of this survey were limited to Board Certified pediatricians who are members of an AAP Chapter located in the United States. Additionally, the survey defined part-time as working 26 hours or less per week in any combination of professional activities, which may not capture all permutations of this employment status.