

# Want docs to treat the underserved? Make sure they train at community health centers

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University of Washington researchers have found that community health center-trained family physicians were more likely to work in underserved settings than their non-community health center-trained counterparts (64 percent versus 37 percent), based on a study published in the April issue of *Family Medicine*.

The news comes on the heels of last month's announcement from the National Resident Matching Program that there is an increased interest in family medicine and more residency positions in that field available across the United States. In addition, the need for family physicians is expected to skyrocket by 2020 to nearly 140,000 family docs, according to the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Scant research has been conducted in the family medicine residency-community health center (CHC) realm, despite an affiliation that dates back more than 25 years. CHCs are federally funded primary care clinics that provide care for underinsured and uninsured patients.

Dr. Carl Morris, assistant professor in the University of Washington's Department of Family Medicine, and the study's lead author, said he was not surprised by the findings. Morris trained as a medical resident from 1994 to 1997 at Sea Mar Community Health Center in Seattle. "These residencies help students match a mission-driven interest with professional aspirations," Morris said. "As a resident, I was inspired by the role models I trained with, and my training helped me better understand the service mission of community health centers." Morris

had a strong desire to provide health-care services to those who needed them most, and he said that his residency provided him with on-the-ground skills to do just that.

With a continued increase in the numbers of uninsured, the recent economic downturn and the anticipated doubling in numbers of physicians needed in CHCs, the UW study results suggest one strategy to bring more health providers to underserved areas is by ensuring there are residency programs based in those centers.

Morris and Drs. Brian Johnson, Sara Kim and Frederick Chen conducted a cross-sectional survey of the 838 graduates from the WWAMI (Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho) Family Medicine Residency network from 1986 to 2002 to reach their conclusion. Because there are no national data to identify either the number of family medicine residencies affiliated with CHCs or the number of residents training with them, more research is needed to better understand the relationship, researchers cautioned.

Source: University of Washington

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