

Residency match results not encouraging for adults needing primary care

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The number of U.S. medical students choosing internal medicine residencies inched higher from 2009 but not enough to significantly impact the shortage of primary care physicians.

According to the 2010 National Resident Matching Program report, 2,722 U.S. seniors at medical schools enrolled in an internal medicine residency program, a 3.4 percent increase from 2,632 in 2009. The internal medicine enrollment numbers are similar to 2008 (2,660), 2007 (2,680), and 2006 (2,668). In comparison, 3,884 U.S. medical school graduates chose internal medicine residency programs in 1985.

"Multiple studies have shown that the U.S. is facing a shortage of [primary care physicians](#)," said Steven Weinberger, MD, FACP, Deputy Executive Vice President and Senior Vice President, Medical Education and Publishing, for the American College of Physicians (ACP). "ACP has consistently called for health care reform to ensure that all Americans have access to a primary care physician, which is crucial for both preventive care and long-term treatment of complex and [chronic diseases](#)."

The 2010 match numbers include students who will ultimately enter a subspecialty of internal medicine, such as cardiology or gastroenterology. Currently, about 20 to 25 percent of internal medicine residents eventually choose to specialize in general internal medicine, compared with 54 percent in 1998.

"Because it takes a minimum of three years of residency after four years of medical school to train an internist, it is critical to begin making careers in internal medicine attractive to young physicians," said Dr. Weinberger. "As America's [aging population](#) increases and more people gain access to affordable coverage, the demand for general internists and other primary care doctors will drastically outpace the primary care physician supply."

Increasing Medicaid and Medicare payments to primary care physicians, expanding pilot testing and implementation of patient-centered medical homes, and increasing support for primary care training programs are ways to increase the number of primary care physicians, according to ACP.

ACP remains concerned about the rising cost of medical education and the resulting financial burden on physicians who choose careers in internal medicine, Dr. Weinberger noted.

Provided by American College of Physicians

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