

Study finds US facing neurologist shortage

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Americans with brain diseases such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis (MS) who need to see a neurologist may face longer wait times or have more difficulty finding a neurologist, according to a new study published in the April 17, 2013, online issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology. The findings are being released as nearly 150 neurologists will descend on Capitol Hill next Tuesday, April 23, 2013, to encourage Congress to protect patients' access to neurologists and ensure there will be care for the one in six Americans currently affected by brain disease.

"We want Congress to act now to help alleviate this shortage at a time when [baby boomers](#) are aging and the number of people with Alzheimer's disease is expected to triple by 2050," said Timothy A. Pedley, MD, FAAN, President of the American Academy of Neurology, the world's largest association of [neurologists](#). "Neurologists are the physicians best suited to care for the one in six people currently affected by neurological disease. It is therefore vital that they have access to neurologists who are specially trained in treating brain diseases."

Cognitive care, or face-to-face time with neurologists, is undervalued by the current [Medicare payment](#) system and neurologists participating in next Tuesday's Neurology on the Hill will be asking for fair reimbursement for face-to-face care of neurology patients. Without fair and stable reimbursement, [medical students](#) and residents who have substantial education debt often are forced to seek more financially rewarding specialties than neurology.

"With the rapidly rising rates of [brain diseases](#) such as dementia and stroke at the same time as the number of US [medical residents](#) choosing neurology over other specialties is clearly declining, the US could face a crisis," said study author Thomas R. Vidic, MD, with Elkhart Clinic in Elkhart, Indiana and a Fellow with the American Academy of Neurology. "Our study found that long [wait times](#) for patients to see a neurologist and difficulty finding neurologists to fill vacant positions are adding to the current national shortfall. In addition, the demand for neurologists is expected to grow as people gain coverage through health care reform."

For the study, researchers created future year projections by reviewing the current number of US neurologists and simulating retirement probability, new graduates, and patient care hours worked.

The study found that the demand for neurologists will grow faster than the supply. The US could use 11 percent more neurologists to meet current needs. By 2025, that number will grow to 19 percent. The study found that the estimated 16,366 US neurologists is projected to increase to 18,060 by 2025, while demand for neurologists is projected to increase from about 18,180 in 2012 to 21,440 during that time.

Previous studies have shown that the average wait times to see a neurologist are increasing. The average wait time for a new patient to see a neurologist in 2012 was 35 business days, up from 28 business days in 2010. The average wait for a follow-up visit in 2012 was 30 days, up from 26 days in 2010. Other studies have shown that these wait times are longer than those for new visits for family practitioners, cardiologists and other specialties.

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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