

Demand for diabetes, thyroid care outpaces supply of endocrinologists

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As more people are diagnosed with diabetes and other hormone conditions, a growing shortage of endocrinologists could force patients to wait longer to see a doctor, according to a new Endocrine Society workforce analysis published in the *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism (JCEM)*.

Endocrinologists are specially trained physicians who diagnose diseases related to the glands. They specialize in treating [diabetes](#), obesity, osteoporosis, thyroid disorders, adrenal diseases, and a variety of other conditions related to hormones.

The analysis found the available supply of endocrinologists who treat adult [patients](#) will exceed the growing demand for their services for at least the next 10 years. As the population ages, the number of older individuals who develop type 2 diabetes or other endocrine conditions is expected to climb. In addition, a significant portion of current endocrinologists are Baby Boomers likely to retire in the next decade.

"There already is a significant shortage of adult endocrinologists. Without a concerted effort to recruit more endocrinologists, the gap between the number of endocrinologists and the demand for their care will increase even further and patients will struggle to get the care they need," said Endocrine Society Past President Robert A. Vigersky, MD, one of the study's authors. "The analysis found the number of new entrants to the workforce must grow at a rate of 14 percent a year to close the gap in five years. Improved reimbursement rates that reflect

the true value of endocrinologists' care are required to encourage more physicians to choose endocrinology as a specialty."

The researchers developed the endocrinologist workforce model using data from proprietary and public databases. The Society conducted an online survey of board-certified endocrinologists and convened a Technical Expert Panel to provide additional data.

The analysis found there is currently a shortage of about 1,500 adult and 100 pediatric full-time endocrinologists nationwide. The demand for pediatric endocrinologists is expected to be met by 2016 as the workforce grows. The gap between supply and demand for adult endocrinologists, however, is expected to remain the same or grow worse as more people are diagnosed with endocrine conditions.

This could lead to longer wait times for patients seeking appointments. The Society's survey found the average wait time for adults making a non-urgent appointment with an endocrinologist was 37 days in 2012. The average wait remained unchanged from 1999, despite a 52 percent increase in the number of board-certified endocrinologists serving adults.

One factor that discourages physicians from specializing in endocrinology is compensation rates. Since much of the care they provide is not based around specific procedures, endocrinologists tend to earn less than their counterparts in specialties such as noninvasive cardiology and gastroenterology.

The analysis also revealed significant changes in the demographics of the endocrinology field. A growing number of women are entering the specialty, and many Baby Boomers will be retiring by 2020. The next generation of endocrinologists also are working fewer hours and seeing fewer patients in an average week than their predecessors.

"Like professionals in other industries, endocrinologists are seeking work-life balance," Vigersky said. "This trend means even more trained endocrinologists are required to serve the growing patient population."

More information: The study, "The Clinical Endocrinology Workforce: Current Status and Future Projections of Supply and Demand," was published online, ahead of print.

Provided by The Endocrine Society

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