

ADDRESSING PHYSICIAN SHORTAGES ON YOUR MEDICAL STAFF



Over the two years many hospitals struggled with retaining healthy staff. But it isn't just the pandemic that is causing the shortage; the number of physicians has been waning for years due to an aging patient population and retiring pool of physicians.

The most recent report from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) projected that the US will be **short up to 139,000 doctors** by 2033. This is up from the shortage of 121,900 projected in 2032 last year.

Addressing Shortages, A Multi-Pronged Approach

With major physician shortages on the horizon, a big question is: how can we fix this? The answer, though, is rarely one-size-fits-all.

COVID-19 created an environment where provider safety had to be given the first priority. Specialty caregivers (coincidentally the segment that will see the biggest decline over the next 15 years) drove the rise in popularity of telemedicine.

Anyone who could see a patient virtually, did so. And, it worked. **80% of physicians used telehealth** during the pandemic, a 2020 survey shows, and 92% of physician respondents expect to keep using telehealth even after the pandemic.

Consumers, too, find value in virtual care, with over **50% of respondents saying they will use telehealth more in 2021 than they did before the pandemic.** These recent survey results pave the way for hybrid care—a combination of virtual and in-person care—to almost seemingly become the norm going forward.

Another solution to physician shortages is hiring advanced practice providers. A study from The New England Journal of Medicine estimates that **67.3% of practitioners added to the workforce between now and 2030 will be advanced practice providers.**

THE BENEFITS OF VIRTUAL STAFFING



Virtual healthcare visits saw rapid growth in the last year. Prior to the pandemic there were concerns that a virtual visit would not provide the level of care that a patient was used to receiving in-person.

A Massachusetts General Hospital study found that patients reported strong personal connections with providers when using telehealth visits. **62% of patients said the quality of telehealth visits was just as good as in-person visits; 21% said it was even better.**

When staffing for a telemedicine position, healthcare organizations have access to a much larger pool of applicants via a broader geographical reach, lessen if not eliminate costs while removing certain administrative burdens.

Physicians and advanced practice providers are also able to begin working immediately by providing online consultations versus having to relocate.

Telemedicine can also help hospitals and healthcare facilities try to prevent burnout.

Three years prior to the pandemic, the AMA noted that nearly **60% of physicians said they felt burned out.**

Telemedicine allows healthcare organizations to even out the workload virtually, fixing both coverage shortage and load imbalances.

Hospitals and healthcare facilities in rural areas, with lower patient volume, also do not have resources to justify the cost of hiring a full-time, in-person physician, advanced practitioner, or specialist.

Virtual staffing can allow for individuals to be shared across multiple facilities to maximize their utilization.

THE RISE OF ADVANCED PRACTICE PROVIDERS



The American Academy of Nurse Practitioners indicates that between 2018 and 2019 **the number of NPs licensed to practice jumped by an estimated 22,000.**

Also, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates the job outlook for advanced practice providers is projected to **grow 52% between now and 2029.**

Primary care is the clinical focus of the majority of advanced practitioners, an area that is estimated to experience physician shortages between 46,900 and 121,900 by 2032.

In fact, advanced practitioners can deliver many of the services typically provided by a primary care physician. As patient demand increases, more and more NPs / APPs are available to resolve the health concerns patients have during this physician shortage.

The growing number of advanced practitioners leads to greater access to care for those who need it most.

Rural communities are often underserved, and metropolitan populations need sufficient care for their numbers. The prevalence of advanced practitioners has increased in both rural and non-rural settings.

While we're all used to seeing an advanced practitioner when we go in to our primary care office, there are many benefits to utilizing APPs in a telehealth setting.

According to a recent study, ***"It has been reported that agencies using telehealth have an average patient-to-nurse ratio of 15:1, as compared with non-telehealth agencies having a ratio of 11:1."***

This means that an advanced practitioner can use telehealth to see more patients and provide timely care. APPs can educate, follow-up, collect data, manage care, and provide family support remotely.



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