

How to Attract More Physicians Into Primary Care



To the Editor:

That only 25% of physicians who enter residency will become generalists is not surprising.¹

Medical educators have done little to promote general practice despite policymakers' concerns about the need for more general practitioners for decades.

In 1966 the Millis Commission publicized the need to train more general practitioners. The Institute of Medicine did the same about 20 years ago. Ever since then, the need for more primary care doctors has appeared regularly in our newspapers. Medical schools for the most part ignored the message and focused on training specialists. But there is a solution to training more general practitioners. By making the training of primary care doctors more practical so they learn the skills and knowledge that they actually need in practice, college premed and medical school could be combined and completed in 4 or 5 years. And because most general practitioners

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do not take care of patients in the hospital, they could complete their training in 2-year residencies in community health centers—not in hospitals. Training time would be decreased by almost one-half. The output of primary care doctors would increase significantly. Over time, the shortage would decrease. But the administrative work, the poor compensation rates, the lack of prestige, the unsatisfactory lifestyle, and the high burnout rates that many generalists complain of and which turn doctors away from a career in primary care, will persist. But this approach would be anathema to most medical educators. What is more likely is that nurse practitioners with advanced training will be joining the primary care workforce and providing those primary care services for which they were trained. Already, advanced practice nurses are licensed to practice independently in many states.

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Reference

1. Dalen JE, Ryan KJ, Alpert JS. The 2017 match and the future US workforce. *Am J Med.* 2018;131(1):2-4.