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Primary care doctors find better job market

Number of offers equals that for specialists for first time in years

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ALBANY -- Doctors seeking careers in primary care had as many job offers as specialists for the first time in years, according to the latest survey of physicians finishing training in New York and moving into the work force.

Primary care doctors received an average of 3.7 job offers, compared to 2.7 in 2002, according to the survey by the Center for Health Workforce Studies at the University at Albany. Job offers for specialists declined slightly to 3.6, compared to 4.3 in 2002.

The center has been surveying doctors as they graduate from residency and fellowships in New York for eight years. The latest report is based on questionnaires filled out by 2,850 doctors who completed training in 2007.

"In the past when we've done it, when you look at the relative demand, primary care physicians had a much tougher time finding jobs than specialists," said Jean Moore, director of the workforce studies center. "Now we are seeing the gap close in job offers."

About 48 percent of the new doctors planned to stay in New York, a trend that has remained steady for the past four years. The number of primary care doctors remaining in New York was 41 percent, down 11 percentage points since 2002. No general surgery graduates remained in New York in 2007.

The Medical Society of the State of New York blamed high malpractice rates.

"General surgeons are running out of here," said Liz Dears, of the medical society.

The group warns that shortages among surgeons and other specialties are beginning to emerge in some rural and urban areas.

The most common reasons cited for leaving were proximity to family and salary, according to the UAlbany study.

"It raises the question that if we recruited more people from New York into our (graduate medical education) system, would they be more inclined to stay?" Moore said.

Less than 2 percent cited malpractice as the principal reason for moving to another state.

The median starting salary for new physicians grew by 13 percent between 2005 and 2007. The specialty with the highest starting salary was orthopedics at \$259,7000. The lowest starting salaries were seen in primary care, \$142,100, and pediatrics \$110,650.

The average education debt for the new doctors was \$100,000.

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