

TOO MANY DOCTORS? 1998 - Nov.

STEPHEN KAMELGARN, M.D.

It seems that every time I turn around, I'm receiving yet another notice to welcome yet another new physician to the area. In the last year alone 58 new physicians have come to Humboldt-Del Norte Counties. This prompted me to ask the question, is our area becoming glutted with physicians?

Don't get me wrong. I like the fact that new physicians are coming to the area; new physicians means new ideas and perspectives, an opportunity for making new friends. But are we getting to the point that we're about to outrun the available resource (numbers of patients)? A physician requires a certain number of patients to make a living. Is the ratio of patients per physician becoming too low?

Back in 1992-93 (when we had many fewer physicians) the Rosenberg Report stated that we had 9 too many primary care physicians. Has the situation gotten better or worse in the past 5 years?

Without going into too many numbers (see accompanying charts) let me point out one salient statistic: Drake and Lowenstein (1998) have defined a physician shortage area as one that contains fewer than 30 physicians per 100,000 population (irrespective of specialty). By this criterion neither Humboldt nor Del Norte County is a physician poor area, with Humboldt having 182 physicians per 100,000 people (6x that of "shortage") and Del Norte having 148 physicians per 100,000 people (only 5x that of "shortage").

The Council on Graduate Medical Education (COGME) estimates that adequate physician manpower (forgive the sexist term) distribution is 145-185 physicians per 100,000 (Grumbach et al 1998). We are right in that ballpark. Therefore, as of this moment, our overall physician supply is optimal, although somewhat mal-distributed (we need more specialists in Del Norte County, and fewer in Humboldt, for example). I leave it to you, the reader, to look and these numbers and dwell upon their ramifications.

We have a wonderful medical community up here on the North Coast, but as our numbers swell we run the risk of "Balkanization;" with us fragmenting into ever smaller and more parochial factions: becoming more and more fractious. Already, we're beginning to have some infighting. A number of my colleagues have commented to me on the decreasing friendliness and collegiality of the environment around here.

In this era of managed care, empaneled physician panels (HMO redundancy at its finest), and as our physician supply continues to climb at a significantly higher rate than our population, we shall most certainly find ourselves engaged in terrific cutthroat economic competition with our colleagues. Who comes out ahead in this scenario? Certainly not the physicians, and, most probably, not the patients either.

We've all heard horror stories of the practice climate in such places as San Francisco, with actual unemployed doctors (formerly an oxymoron). Do we wish to foster the same climate up here in our little corner of paradise? I think not.

Chart #1

ESTIMATES OF PHYSICIAN DISTRIBUTION STATE WIDE:

PHYSICIAN SHORTAGE IS:	<30/100,000 (Drake & Lowenstein 1998)
1995 TOTAL U.S. PHYSICIAN DISTRIBUTION:	184/100,000 (Grumbach et al 1998)
1995 TOTAL CALIFORNIA MD DISTRIBUTION:	186/100,000 (Grumbach et al 1998)
1992 CA Distribution (Specialist)	123/100,000
1992 CA Distribution (Generalist)	67/100,000

COGME ESTIMATES OF MD NEEDS:

(Grumbach et al 1998)

TOTAL	145-185/100,000
GENERALISTS (GP, FP, Gen IM, Gen Peds)	60-80/100,000
SPECIALISTS	85-105/100,000

HUMBOLDT-DEL NORTE PHYSICIAN DISTRIBUTION:

(Center Numbers indicate #MD's/total Population)

TOTAL	278.25/158,050	176/100,000
HUMBOLDT	234.75/128,800	182/100,000
DEL NORTE	43.5/29,350	148/100,000
GENERALISTS	115.75/158,050	73.23/100,000
HUMBOLDT	92.75/128,800	72.01/100,000
DEL NORTE	22/29,350	74.96/100,000
SPECIALISTS	163.5/158,050	103.44/100,000
HUMBOLDT	141.5/128,800	109.86/100,000
DEL NORTE	22/29,350	74.96/100,000

References:

Grumbach, Kevin, M.D.; Janet M. Coffman M.D.; John Q Young, Karen Vranizan, and Noelle Blick;
Physician Supply and Medical Education in California: A comparison with national trends. Western Journal of
Medicine May 1998 (5) 412-421

Drake, Micael V. & Daniel Lowenstein; *The Role of Diversity in the Health Care Needs of California* Western
Journal of Medicine May 1998 (5) 168:348-354

Chart #2

Physician Distribution by Specialty:Humboldt-Del Norte County:

Number of FTE's, best estimate Oct. 1998

	<i>Eureka</i>	<i>Arcata/Mc Kinleyville/ Blue Lake/ Trinidad</i>	<i>Fortuna/ Ferndale Scotia Rio Dell</i>	<i>Willow Creek/ Hoopa</i>	<i>SoHum</i>	<i>Del Norte</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>1° Care</i>	32.75	39	14.5	4	3.5	22	115.75
<i>OB</i>	5	4	2	0	0	1	12
<i>Med SubSp</i>	19.5	2	0	0	0	1.5	23
<i>G Surg</i>	4.5	1.5	2	0	0	2	10
<i>Surg SubSp</i>	34	10	6	0	0	8	58
<i>Psych</i>	12	1	0	0	0	1	14
<i>ER/Urg Care</i>	14	6.5	4	0	0	6.5	31
<i>Radiology</i>	6.5	2	2	0	1	2	13.5
<i>Derm</i>	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Total	129.25	66	31.5	4	4.5	44	279.25

NOTE: For practices that maintain more than one office (Eureka Pediatrics or HCMA for example) one of the full time physician was arbitrarily moved to the second office. E.G. Eureka Pediatrics has 4 full time physicians in two offices. This was counted as 3 physicians in Eureka and 1 physician in Arcata/McKinleyville

Chart #3

Primary Care Physician Distribution per 100,000 Population

<i>Area</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>M.D's per 100,00</i>
<i>Combined Humboldt-Del Norte Counties</i>	158,050	73.23
<i>Del Norte County</i>	29,250	75.21
<i>Del Norte County less Prison Population</i>	25,250	67.33
<i>Humboldt County</i>	128,800	72.79
<i>Eureka</i>	28,800	113.71
<i>Arcata, McKinleyville, Blue Lake, Trinidad</i>	43,053	90.59
<i>Fortuna, Ferndale, Scotia, Rio Dell</i>	16,135	89.87
<i>“Metro Bay” (The 3 areas above)</i>	87,813	98.22
<i>Willow Creek, Hoopa, Orleans</i>	3211	124.57
Southern Humboldt	1275	274.5

Chart #4

Specialty Care Physician Distribution Per 100,000 Population

<i>Area</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>MD's /100,000 Population</i>
<i>Combined Humboldt-Del Norte Counties</i>	158,050	171.58
<i>Del Norte County</i>	29,250	75.21
<i>Del Norte County less Prison Population</i>	25,250	87.13
<i>Humboldt County</i>	128,800	109.86
<i>Eureka</i>	28,800	335.07
<i>Arcata, McKinleyville, Blue Lake, Trinidad</i>	43,053	62.71
<i>Fortuna, Ferndale, Scotia, Rio Dell</i>	16,135	105.36
<i>“Metro Bay” (The 3 areas above)</i>	87,813	160
<i>Willow Creek, Hoopa, Orleans</i>	3211	0
Southern Humboldt	1275	78.43

Chart #5

Gain/Loss of Physicians over past 1 year:

	<i>Eureka</i>	<i>Arcata et al</i>	<i>Fortuna et al</i>	<i>Willow Creek</i>	<i>So Hum</i>	<i>Del Norte</i>
<i>1° Care (-)</i>	2	2	0	1	1	5
<i>1° Care (+)</i>	4	9	1	3	1	7
<i>Net</i>	2	7	1	2	0	2
<i>Med SS (-)</i>	1	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Med SS (+)</i>	4	1	0	0	0	0
<i>Net</i>	3	1	0	0	0	0
<i>OB (-)</i>	1	0	0	0	0	0
<i>OB (+)</i>	1	1	0	0	0	1
<i>Net</i>	0	1	0	0	0	1
<i>Gen Surg (-)</i>	1	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Gen Surg (+)</i>	0	1	1	0	0	1
<i>Net</i>	-1	1	1	0	0	1
<i>Surg SS (-)</i>	3	0	0	0	0	1
<i>Surg SS (+)</i>	5	1	1	0	0	1
<i>Net</i>	2	1	1	0	0	0
<i>Psych (-)</i>	2	0	0	0	0	1
<i>Psych (+)</i>	2	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Net</i>	0	0	0	0	0	-1
<i>ER (-)</i>	1	0	0	0	0	1
<i>ER (+)</i>	5	3	0	0	0	3
<i>Net</i>	4	3	0	0	0	2
<i>Rad (-)</i>	1	1	0	0	0	0
<i>Rad (+)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Net</i>	-1	-1	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	9	13	3	2	0	5

Net Gain is 32 Physicians + 2 Pathologists = 34 Net Gain in past year.