

Who Will Manage American Patients with Diabetes in the Near Future?

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Abstract

Previous work has estimated that the US has a 12–15% undersupply of endocrinologists, with this shortage predicted to expand to 25–30% by 2020. The aim of this study was to investigate why medical students are not choosing to specialize in endocrinology. Survey questionnaires were distributed to medical school students from 47 US medical schools, resulting in 524 participants (response rate ~5–10%). The survey results confirm that medical students are staying away from diabetes: only seven students (1.3%) expressed an interest in endocrinology and only three of those were interested in pursuing diabetes care. Students cited the challenges of inadequate compensation (34.9%), lack of procedures (37.9%), and modifying patient behavior (46%) as central factors in deterring them from specializing in diabetes. In contrast, almost half of the students (48.8%) cited the social importance of diabetes care and the pandemic status (33.4%) as reasons to enter the field, indicating awareness of the societal need. These data suggest that due to lack of financial incentives, few US students plan to enter the field of endocrinology; approximately half of current endocrine fellows are foreign-trained. Based on this data, we believe that increasing physician interest will require significant changes to reimbursement structure.

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