

The Future Pediatric Subspecialty Physician Workforce: Meeting the Needs of Infants, Children, and Adolescents

Promoting Collaboration and the Effective Use of Services Between Pediatric Primary Care Clinicians and Subspecialty Physicians

Pediatric subspecialty physicians augment the care provided by primary care clinicians, such as general pediatricians, advanced practice providers (e.g., advanced practice registered nurses, physician assistants), and family medicine physicians by caring for children who require technical procedures or have health conditions that occur too infrequently for primary care clinicians to gain and maintain up-to-date clinical knowledge. In high-functioning health systems, pediatric subspecialists and primary care clinicians work collaboratively to provide high-quality care for children. However, there are currently widespread inefficiencies and variability in the interactions between primary care and subspecialty care.

The Consensus Study Report *The Future Pediatric Subspecialty Physician Workforce: Meeting the Needs of Infants, Children, and Adolescents* recommends strategies and actions necessary to ensure an adequate pediatric subspecialty physician workforce—one that can support broad access to high-quality subspecialty care and a robust research portfolio to advance the health and health care of infants, children, and adolescents. High-quality pediatric subspecialty care requires the support and appropriate use of both the primary care workforce and the pediatric subspecialty care workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Data on Children's Health, Access to Care, and the Pediatric Workforce

Improved monitoring of children's changing health care needs and demands, the status of their access to care, and trends in the composition of the pediatric workforce are all essential to inform future workforce planning efforts and will help determine the appropriate education and training needed to prepare the workforce for collaboratively meeting children's health care needs. It will also help determine which subspecialties should be prioritized for different interventions or programs and inform innovative models of care to improve access. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality should submit a biennial report to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services summarizing the changing demands and needs for pediatric primary and subspecialty care, the status of access to that care, and disparities in the receipt of those services. That report should include information on the pediatric generalist and subspecialist workforce broadly, including data on clinicians from backgrounds underrepresented in medicine.

Collaboration and Efficient Use of Workforce

In general, both pediatric subspecialty physicians and primary care clinicians are not optimally trained about

their role and responsibilities in the referral process, resulting in wide primary care and subspecialist practice variation. Many children with common and lower-complexity or lower-severity diagnoses referred to subspecialists could be managed by primary care clinicians either alone (with appropriate time, financial resources, and training) or through active, collaborative co-management with the subspecialist. The use of new technologies and methods of care can increase patient access, improve care coordination, strengthen the role of the primary care clinician, and allow subspecialists the necessary time to provide inpatient and outpatient care that is feasible, fulfilling, financially sustainable, and best for children. However, barriers in payment and regulation prevent the full implementation and scaling of promising evidence-based models. Specifically, strategies to help enhance collaboration and efficient use of the workforce include:

- Collaborative development, dissemination, and implementation of testing, management, and referral guidelines for health conditions commonly managed by subspecialists.
- Reimbursement for evidence-based care delivery models that improve interprofessional, integrated, team-based care to enhance access to pediatric

subspecialty care such as e-consults, telehealth, and integrated care teams.

- Development, implementation, and evaluation of innovations (including new models of care delivery and reimbursement) in the primary-specialty care interface and the pediatric subspecialty referral and care coordination processes.

LOOKING FORWARD

While collaborating with primary care clinicians, pediatric subspecialists need to focus on the care of children with complex, severe, and rare disorders or those requiring technical procedures. Several promising evidence-based models of care can increase access to pediatric subspecialty care and support the judicious use of all members of interprofessional pediatric care teams without changing the number of subspecialists. Implementing these recommendations for the development of testing, management, and referral guidelines; the appropriate reimbursement of team-based care models; the development, implementation, and evaluation of primary-specialty care interface innovations; and the creation of a report on children's access to health care and the adequacy of the pediatric workforce will help support broad access to high-quality pediatric subspecialty care.

To download a free copy of the full report and other resources, visit www.nationalacademies.org/pediatric-subspecialties.

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