

Primary Care Workforce Facts and Stats No. 2

The Number of Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants Practicing Primary Care in the United States

SUMMARY: In 2010, approximately 56,000 nurse practitioners and 30,000 physician assistants were practicing primary care in the United States, according to research commissioned by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

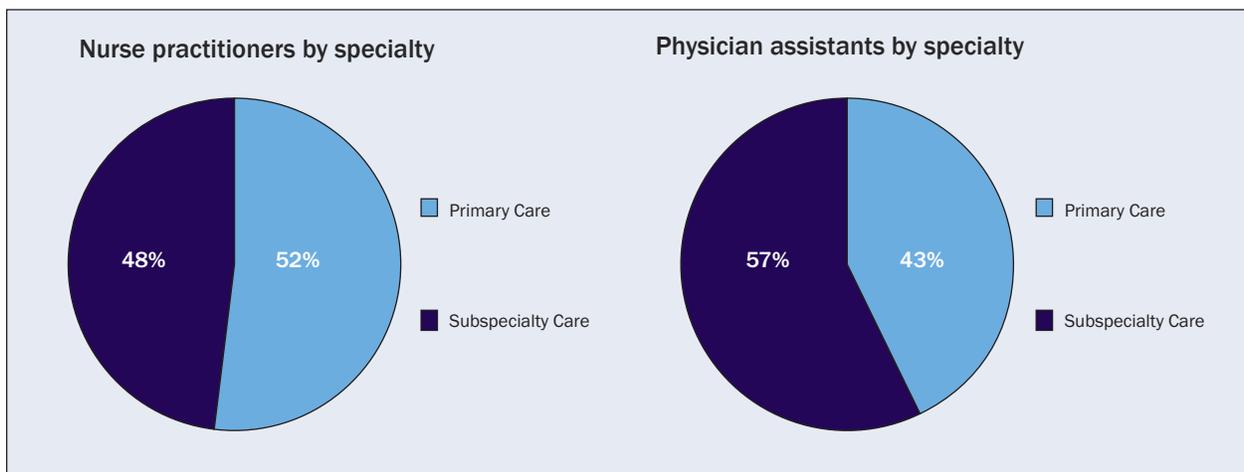
Nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician assistants (PAs) are health professions begun in the United States in the 1960s in response to shortages and uneven distribution of physicians. They play important roles in many health care fields and especially in primary care.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services maintains the National Provider Identifier (NPI) dataset, which listed approximately 106,000 practicing nurse practitioners and 70,000 practicing physician assistants in 2010. This estimate represents approximately 10,000 fewer practicing physician assistants than projected by the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) and approximately 10,000 more nurse practitioners than report having NP in their title in a 2008 national survey.¹

To estimate the number of nurse practitioners and physician assistants who are practicing primary care, the Robert Graham Center used the NPI dataset to examine the practice partners of each nurse practitioner and physician assistant. Using a novel imputation method that assigned field of practice (primary care or a subspecialty care) to each NP and PA based on the specialty of the professionals they work with, the Center estimated that less than half of physician assistants (approximately 30,000) and slightly more than half of nurse practitioners (approximately 56,000) are practicing primary care in 2010.

Estimated number of nurse practitioners and physician assistants practicing primary care in the United States, 2010

| Provider type | Total | Percent primary care | Practicing primary care |
|----------------------|---------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Nurse practitioners | 106,073 | 52.0% | 55,625 |
| Physician assistants | 70,383 | 43.4% | 30,402 |



This is one in a series being produced by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's (AHRQ) Center for Primary Care, Prevention, and Clinical Partnerships to further inform policy discussions around the U.S. primary care workforce. Information is based on a comprehensive primary care workforce analysis conducted by the Robert Graham Center for AHRQ. Please visit <http://www.ahrq.gov/research/pcworkforce.htm> for more in the Primary Care Workforce Facts and Stats series.

Reference

1. The Registered Nurse Population: Findings from the 2008 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses. Table 45, Appendix A. <http://thefutureofnursing.org/sites/default/files/RN%20Nurse%20Population.pdf>



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