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News in brief

The meteoric rise of the physician assistant

Since the profession's tenuous beginnings in 1967, the role of the physician assistant (PA) has grown in both scope and relevance in today's healthcare environment.

Hospitalists programs are increasingly forming partnerships with PAs to lighten increasing workloads and improve efficiencies in day-to-day operations, and hospitalists are not alone in doing so, according to a new study in the *Journal of Allied Health*.

The study, "Growth and Change in the Physician Assistant Workforce in the United States, 1967–2000," not only charts the relatively meteoric rise in the position's popularity but also challenges some of the early stereotypes about who seeks out PA positions, where they work, and the profession's long-term sustainability.

For example, the study shows that the number of PA program graduates grew from 282 in 1972 to nearly 4,000 by the year 2000, despite strong and even hostile opposi-

tion to the position in the formative years, the authors note. The data also show that despite almost exclusively male graduating classes in the late 1960s and early 1970s, 67% of 2000 graduates were women. Early conceptions that the position would work primarily in rural environments also proved to be untrue; between 1980 and 2000, the PA population was "fairly evenly distributed," the study says.

Despite the dearth of information regarding the growth of the PA position in the past four decades, the study authors write that there are many important aspects of the PA profession yet to be thoroughly explored, including:

- The number of PAs and PA programs the work force can sustain
- Specialty roles for PAs
- Long-term effects of women's increased role in the profession
- Changing academic requirements

To read the study, visit: www.asahp.org/pdf/JAH_34%203%20121_Larson.pdf.

Do as physicians say, not as physicians do?

A new survey conducted by the *Annals of Internal Medicine* suggests that in some situations, physicians will act inconsistently with their beliefs, according to a December 4, 2007, article in *The Boston Globe*.

In one such instance, nearly half of physicians surveyed indicated that they did not "report an impaired or incompetent colleague or a serious medical error," the article says, despite believing such actions to be contrary to their professional duties.

According to the *Annals of Internal Medicine* Web site, the survey sought to explore the "prospect of improving care through increased professionalism" by collecting relevant data about physician attitudes.

To read the article, visit www.boston.com/news/health/articles/2007/12/04/doctors_dont_report_colleagues_errors.

To access the survey (subscription required), go to: www.annals.org/cgi/content/full/147/11/795. ■