

ACP AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS

INTERNAL MEDICINE | *Doctors for Adults*

Debt, Earnings and Expenses of Primary Care Physicians

- Primary care physicians provide the great majority of evaluation and management services, according to data from the National Ambulatory Care Survey. In 1999, the average number of visits per week by specialty were:
 - *Family practice – 122.9*
 - *General pediatrics – 120.5*
 - *General internal medicine – 106.5*

- Evaluation and management (E/M) services are grossly undervalued by Medicare:
 - Over the past 10 years, the number of E/M services furnished grew slowly, relative to some other types of services, thereby *nullifying any gains in the relative value of E/M services* that initially resulted from implementation of the resource-based relative value scale in 1992. (According to recent analysis by the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission.)
 - Data from the NAMCS show that *patients have more chronic conditions, are older, are more complex, have more diagnoses per encounter, more drug mentions per encounter, more diagnostic and screening services per encounter, and more counseling, education, and therapeutic services per encounter*. The diagnoses and drug mentions per E/M encounter have been higher for medical specialties than for surgical specialties.

- Primary care physicians – the bedrock of medical care for today and the future – are at the bottom of the list of all medical specialties in median income compensation. One example shows that internists have a median income that is 41 percent less than general surgeons. (Medical Group Management Association’s 2006 Compensation Data)

- Decreasing interest in primary care and medical specialties:
 - Percentage of third-year internal medicine residents planning to practice internal medicine has dropped from 54 percent in 1998 to 27 percent in 2003. (Garibaldi, Career Plans for Trainees in Internal Medicine Residency Programs, Academic Medicine, 2005)
 - According to the same study, only 19 percent of first-year residents reported that they were planning careers in general internal medicine.
 - A 2004 survey of internists who were board certified in the early 1990s found that 21 percent of respondents who were general internists replied that they were no longer working in internal medicine, compared to only 4 percent for internal medicine subspecialists. (Sox, Leaving (Internal) Medicine, Annals of Internal Medicine, January 3, 2006)