

Mid-Hudson region not attracting doctors

Cost of being in medicine among deterrents

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Malpractice insurance for an obstetrician in Newburgh can be \$40,000 more than in Beacon. And that discrepancy is among the reasons why parts of the Hudson Valley have trouble attracting and keeping doctors, a new study has found.

Doctors nationwide are retiring faster than medical schools are graduating new physicians, and more doctors are getting closer to retirement. In 2008 in Orange County, 38 percent of doctors were over age 55. In Sullivan, it's 50 percent, and in Ulster, 41 percent.

Doctors are also clustering in urban areas, leaving many rural areas underserved.

A rural deficiency

"When you look at the numbers, it seems like we have enough doctors per person, but there are rural areas where it's difficult to get adequate amounts of primary care, and then there are places where they're having difficulty recruiting and retaining specialists because they're in direct competition with New York City," said Joshua Simons, research associate at the Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach of SUNY New Paltz, which did the study.

The Hudson Valley needed 148 new physicians in 2007, according to the Healthcare Association of New York State. It got 10.

Hospital vs. private practice

In Sullivan County, Catskill Regional Medical Center doesn't have much trouble recruiting doctors on staff because it's a medical-shortage area, which lets them offer some fairly attractive incentives, said hospital CEO Steve Ruwoldt. But the county has trouble attracting doctors to private practice because its rural nature leaves single doctors without much nightlife — and married doctors with concern over services for their families, he said.

The Hudson Valley also loses out on many doctors who choose to practice in Connecticut or New Jersey, where malpractice rates are lower and reimbursement rates are higher, said Sue Sullivan, vice president of development and government affairs at St. Luke's Cornwall Hospital.

On top of that, the cost of being a doctor is a deterrent.

These are issues that should be addressed in health-reform legislation, Ruwoldt said.

"They come out of medical school with huge debts, and then they walk into a practice where the payments are being cut and their malpractice insurance is expensive," he said. "So why would anybody with any intelligence go into medicine?"

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