General Surgeons On List Of Most In-Demand Physicans

IRVING, Texas, June 24 /PRNewswire/ -- Primary care physicians are in greater demand today than any other type of doctor, according to a new report by national physician search firm Merritt Hawkins & Associates, an AMN Healthcare company.

The firm's 2009 Review of Physician Recruiting Incentives tracks over 3,200 physician recruiting assignments Merritt Hawkins conducted from April 1, 2008, to March 31, 2009. During that period, the company fielded more requests for family physicians than for any other type of doctor, followed by general internists, who also provide primary care. Requests for primary care doctors, defined as family physicians, internists and pediatricians, increased 23 percent over the previous 12-month period examined in the survey.

"Virtually every hospital or large medical group in the United States would be happy to add a family physician or general internist," notes Merritt Hawkins' president Mark Smith. "There simply are not enough primary care doctors to go around."

According to Smith, a shortage of primary care doctors is the result of a burgeoning demand for primary care services combined with a shrinking supply of generalist physicians. Fewer medical students are choosing primary care specialties at a time when the population is both growing and aging, Smith notes. The shortage of primary care physicians will only be exacerbated if access to medical services is expanded through healthcare reform, Smith says.

General surgeons, who often are referred to as the "primary care physicians of surgery," follow internists (and internists working as hospitalists) on Merritt Hawkins' list of most in-demand physicians. General surgery is another specialty that is less favored by medical students today, Smith observes, and many general surgeons are retiring with no doctors to replace them.

Merritt Hawkins' report tracks the types of incentives typically used to recruit physicians. Signing bonuses were offered to physicians in 85 percent of the searches Merritt Hawkins represented in 2008/09, up from 74 percent the previous year and up from 58 percent three years ago. The report shows that the average signing bonus offered to physicians is $24,850, in addition to salaries ranging from $171,000 for pediatricians to $481,000 for orthopedic surgeons. The widespread use of signing bonuses underlines the increasingly competitive nature of physician recruiting, according to Smith.

Though physicians have traditionally operated as independent practitioners, the report suggests that more hospitals are hiring physicians as employees and paying them directly through salaries. In 2005/06, 23 percent of the physician search

assignments Merritt Hawkins represented featured physician employment by a hospital. In the 2008/09, that number increased to 45 percent.

"Many physicians today are throwing in the towel when it comes to private practice," Smith says. "They are exchanging independence for the relative simplicity and security of employment."

Complete results of Merritt Hawkins & Associates' 2009 Review of Physician Recruiting Incentives can be accessed at www.merritthawkins.com [1].

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