Survey: Use Of Temporary Physicians Rising

The use of temporary physicians is rising, underlining the ongoing shortage of doctors nationwide, a new survey suggests.

Conducted by Staff Care, a national temporary physician staffing firm and company of AMN Healthcare (NYSE: AHS), the survey polled hospital and medical group managers about their use of temporary physicians, also known as locum tenens. The majority of those surveyed (85 percent) said their facilities had used temporary physicians sometime in the last 12 months, up from 72 percent the previous year. The primary reason hospitals and medical groups use temporary doctors, cited by 63 percent of those surveyed, is to fill in until a permanent doctor can be found.

"There are simply too few physicians to fill all the available vacancies today," notes Tim Boes, president of Staff Care. "Temporary doctors are providing critical, interim patient care services for many healthcare facilities until they can find the full-time physicians they need."

The survey also suggests which types of physicians are in the most demand as temporary practitioners. Number one on the list are psychiatrists and other behavioral health specialists. According to Boes, the number of psychiatrists trained in the United States has remained flat in recent years, while demand for mental health services has spiked due to population growth, patient aging, and the stress bred by economic recession and two wars. Psychiatrists and other behavioral health professionals accounted for 22 percent of requests for temporary physicians Staff Care received in 2010, followed by primary care physicians (20 percent of requests), internal medicine subspecialists (12 percent), anesthesia providers (11 percent), surgeons (7 percent), hospitalists (9 percent), radiologists (7 percent), emergency medicine (4 percent), dentists (4 percent) and oncologists (2 percent).

According to Boes, physicians are embracing locum tenens practice because it relieves them of the reimbursement, malpractice, and bureaucratic challenges they face today. "Locum tenens allows doctors to do what they do best, which is provide patient care," Boes observes.

Complete results of Staff Care's 2011 Survey of Temporary Physician Staffing Trends can be accessed at www.staffcare.com [1]

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