

## Introduction

Though family physicians, general practitioners, and general internists are most commonly recognized as providers of primary care, obstetric-gynecologists (ob-gyn) physicians are sometimes classified as primary care because they provide most of the care for substantial numbers of women, especially those of reproductive age.

Most of the care provided by ob-gyn is for women of reproductive age (14-44) and for pregnancy related visits. Still, many women in midlife continue to see an ob-gyn physician (Figure 1).

## Objective

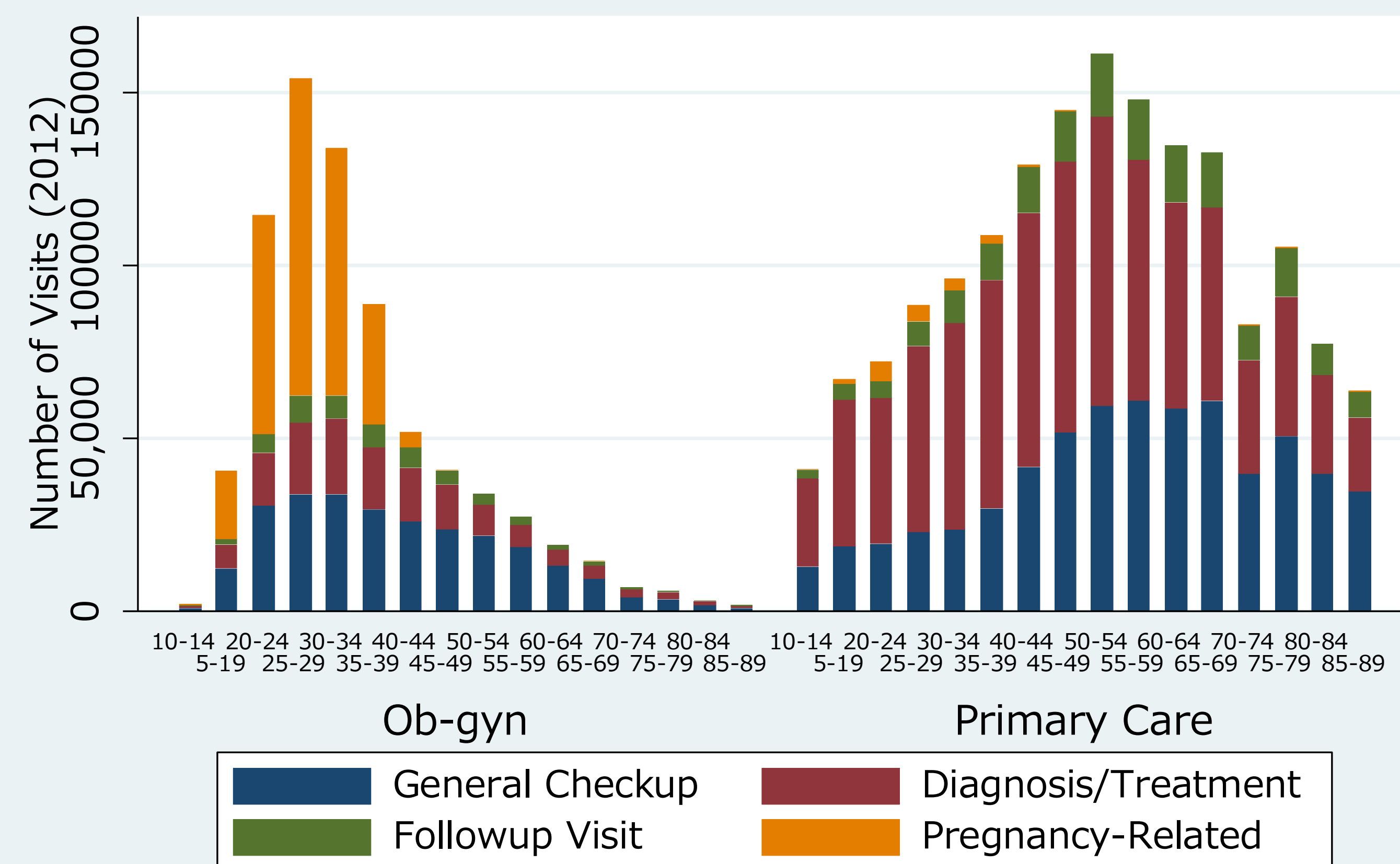
The objectives of this study were to examine the types of physician offices sought by women in midlife and to compare across specialties the reason for their visit.

## Study Design

**Methods:** This study was designed as a descriptive study using data from the 2002-2012 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey. The sample included 44,830 women between 45 and 64 years old with 330,114 office-based visits to physicians.

Physician specialty was determined based on the patients' report. Visits to non-physicians were excluded. Visits for general checkups, follow up and for diagnosis/treatment were examined across physician specialty. We examined women's visits over the course of a year to determine if they saw only an family physician/general internist, only an ob-gyn physicians, or both types. Multivariate multinomial logistic regression models were estimated controlling for patient demographics, income and reported health.

Figure 1. Reason for Office-Based Visit, by Age and Physician Specialty



## Results

Table 1. Reason for Visit by Physician Specialty, 2002 and 2012

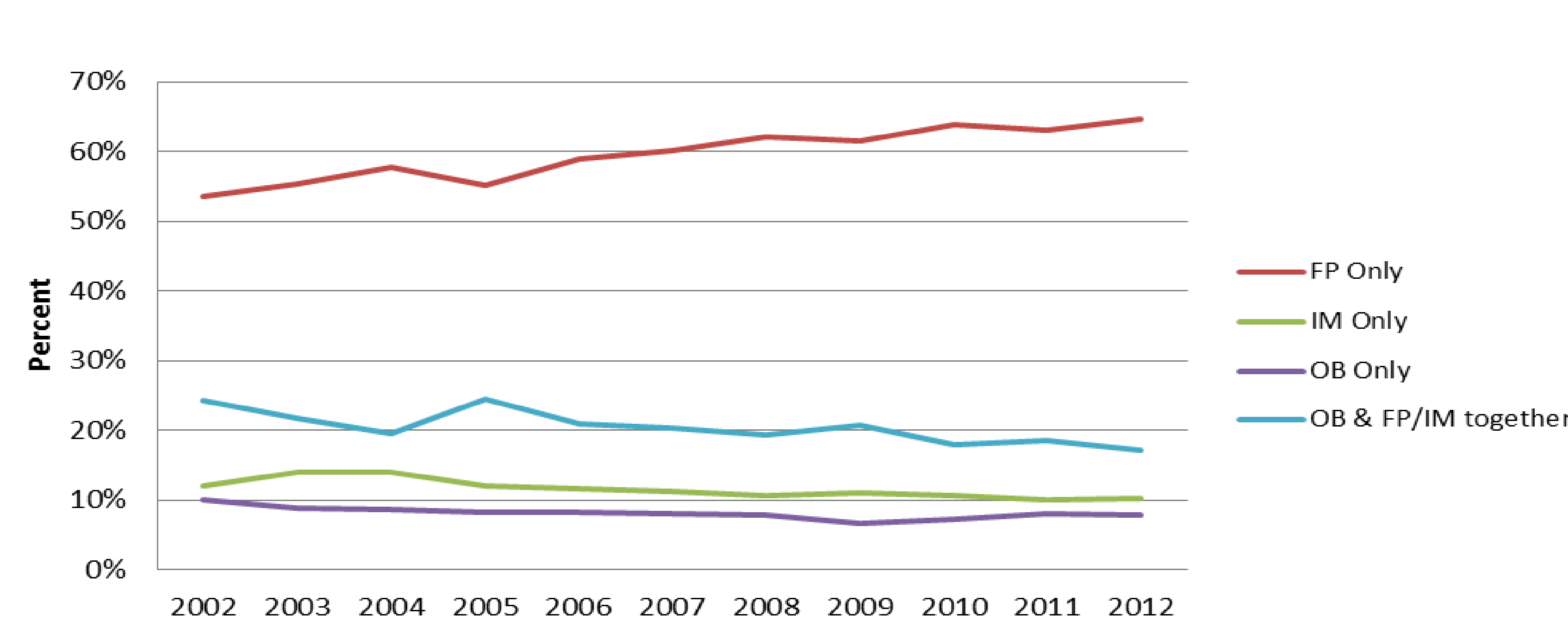
	Family Physicians		OB-GYN		General Internists		Other Physicians	
	2002	2012	2002	2012	2002	2012	2002	2012
General Checkup	34.4	41.1	61.4	63.0	34.3	49.8	14.7	19.3
Diagnosis/Treatment	49.4	44.1	25.7	25.6	46.0	36.6	51.9	48.9
Follow up	11.0	11.0	8.8	9.2	14.2	11.2	15.1	16.3
Other	5.2	3.8	4.1	2.1	5.5	2.4	18.4	15.5

- Reasons for the office visit of women aged 45-64 varied substantially across different types of physicians (Table 1). More than 60% of visits to ob-gyn physicians were for "general checkups" and about one-fourth were for "diagnosis or treatment."
- By contrast, the reason for a visit to family physicians and general practitioners are more commonly for diagnosis or treatment, although the percentage has declined significantly across time, from 49.4% in 2002 to 44.1% in 2012.
- The drop in the proportion of visits for diagnosis or treatment was even more pronounced among general internists, from 46.0% in 2002 to 36.6% in 2012

Table 2. Adjusted Distribution of Combinations of Care for Women Aged 45-64

Region		PC Only	OBG ONLY	OBG & PC	OTHER	NO VISIT
Region	North East	36.2%	11.5%	13.0%	24.1%	15.1%
	Midwest	44.2%	8.6%	9.3%	23.3%	14.6%
	South	42.6%	9.9%	11.8%	19.8%	16.0%
Federal Poverty Level	West	42.8%	7.3%	8.0%	25.0%	16.9%
	<100%	43.8%	5.8%	8.3%	19.5%	22.6%
	100-125%	43.0%	5.8%	9.4%	20.2%	21.6%
Location	125-200%	43.6%	6.2%	8.0%	21.6%	20.5%
	200-400%	43.7%	8.1%	9.3%	21.7%	17.2%
	>400%	40.1%	10.9%	12.2%	24.2%	12.6%
	Metropolitan	41.0%	9.5%	10.8%	22.7%	16.0%
Reported Health	Non-Metropolitan	45.2%	8.5%	9.7%	22.1%	14.4%
	Excellent	32.3%	12.1%	9.3%	24.4%	21.9%
	Very Good	38.7%	10.5%	11.5%	22.4%	17.0%
	Good	44.2%	7.6%	11.2%	21.9%	15.1%
	Fair	54.0%	5.5%	10.2%	21.2%	9.1%
Marital Status	Poor	56.9%	4.5%	9.4%	23.3%	5.8%
	Married	41.8%	9.4%	10.8%	21.6%	16.4%
	Unmarried	42.8%	9.3%	10.3%	23.7%	13.9%
Employment Status	Never Married	37.4%	9.4%	9.6%	26.4%	17.2%
	Employed	42.1%	10.0%	11.3%	22.9%	13.7%
Insurance Coverage	Not Employed	41.5%	9.2%	10.4%	22.4%	16.6%
	Private	41.9%	10.3%	11.8%	23.2%	12.8%
	Public	51.9%	5.7%	9.0%	21.3%	12.1%
	Not Insured	34.7%	4.0%	3.9%	21.3%	36.2%

Figure 2. Percentage of women age 45 to 64 seeking office-based care in a year, by physician specialty



Among midlife women who sought care at a physician's office, nearly 60% went to a family physician only, 10% went to either an ob-gyn or a general internist only, and 21% went to both an ob-gyn and either a family physician or general internist. (Figure 2). There is a significant increase across time in the percentage who obtained care only from family physicians and a corresponding decrease in the percentage obtaining care from ob-gyn and primary care physicians.

- The adjusted rates reported in Table 2 are based on a multinomial logistic regression.
- Midlife women who went to an ob-gyn office only were more inclined to have a high family income, live in the Northeast, and describe their overall health as being good to excellent.
- Those who saw both an ob-gyn and primary care physician are also more affluent but there is not a strong association with reported health.

## Conclusions

- Most women aged 45-64 years seek care at offices of family physicians or general internists for diagnosis and treatment of an illness.
- Nearly one-third sought part or all of their care at ob-gyn offices, primarily for general check ups and rare pregnancies
- Given the increasing medical issues inherent in a population as it ages, physicians, regardless of specialty, serving as a primary care provider for women in midlife should be prepared to provide comprehensive care.
- Findings from this investigation also found a significant number of women seeing both an ob-gyn and either a family physician or general internist. With the need for effective care coordination and cost effectiveness, all physicians need to be on guard for resource over-utilization while ensuring the provision of full scope care to their patients.
- Overlap in care provided at more than one physicians' office requires continued surveillance in minimizing redundant cost and optimize resource utilization.