Economic Impact of Family Physicians in Georgia

Robert Graham Center *June 2007*

Who are family physicians?

Family physicians provide a personal medical home for people of any age. Family physicians complete at least three years of specialty training, learning how to deliver a range of acute, chronic and preventive medical care services. In addition to diagnosing and treating illness, they also provide preventive care including routine check-ups, health risk assessments, immunization and screening tests, and personalized counseling on maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Family physicians also manage chronic illnesses and coordinate care with other sub specialists. From heart disease, stroke and hypertension, to diabetes, cancer and asthma, family physicians provide primary care for the nation's most serious health problems.

While most medical specialties tend to cluster in urban areas and near academic health centers, family physicians are more likely than other primary care physicians to work in areas with the greatest needs — e.g. rural areas and health professional shortage areas (HPSA) federally designated area or populations (bhpr.hrsa.gov — Department of Health and Human Services) with the lowest ratios of health providers to population.

Do family physicians generate economic benefits for Georgia?

In addition to the health care services they provide, family physicians are significant generators of economic activity in local communities. Family physicians provide employment, purchase goods and services and even generate income to other health care organizations such as hospitals and nursing homes.

A recent study by the Robert Graham Center for Policy Studies evaluated the impact of family physicians on a state-by-state basis. These figures do not account for a family physician's contribution to the generation of income for other local health care organizations such as hospitals and nursing homes. The study found that in Georgia, family physicians have an economic impact of $1,028,774 per doctor, per year. The total impact of family physicians in Georgia is estimated to be $1,674,844,376 per year.

Table 1: Economic Impact of Family Physicians in Georgia

Impact per family physician per year	$ 1,028,774
Total Impact per year	$ 1,674,844,376

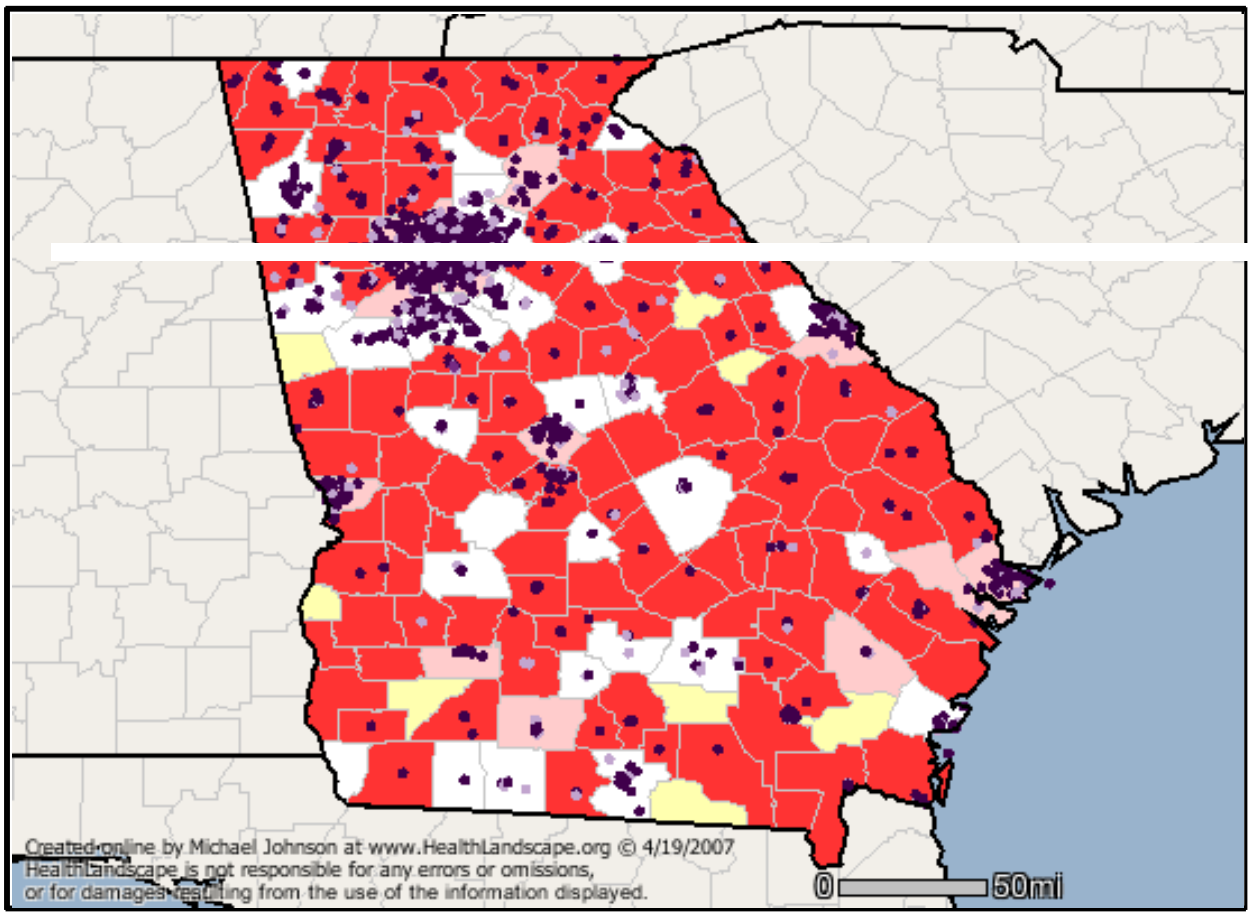
Source: Robert Graham Center for Policy Studies – www.graham-center.org

How does this affect family physicians in Georgia?

The Commonwealth Fund's Commission on a High Performance Health System (www.cmwf.org (http://www.cmwf.org/)) seeks to move the U.S.toward a health care system that achieves better access, improved quality and greater efficiency, particularly for those who are most vulnerable. The Commonwealth Fund states that the United Statescannot achieve a high performing healthcare system without "…developing the workforce required to foster patient-centered primary care…" Furthermore, the American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Physicians and American Osteopathic Association have called for a patient-centered medical home for all Americans.

Family physicians are trained to provide that medical home, improving access to health care for communities in the greatest need. In addition, as *Table 1* demonstrates, family physicians can serve as economic engines for your state. Family physicians contribute to the economic viability of the communities they serve, as highly educated consumers, employers and purchasers. States choosing to invest in loan repayment, primary care residency training and tax incentives for practice in underserved areas should consider not only the health benefits, but also the potential return on investment for some of the most economically deprived areas of the state.

Georgia Family Physicians and Primary Care HPSA



This map shows the locations of family physicians in the state of Georgia over a county map displaying federally designated primary care health professional shortage areas (HPSA). Primary care HPSAs are counties or portions of counties in the United States with the lowest ratio of primary care physicians to population. As seen on the preceding page and in this map, the impact of family physicians spreads across Georgia. Policies that positively impact recruitment and retention of family physicians within Georgia will not only contribute to an increase in the availability and provision of quality health care services in underserved counties, but will also have a significant impact on the local economy by generating jobs, income and development. If you would like to explore health data relevant to Georgia and make your own maps of the physician workforce, please visit: www.healthlandscape.org

LEGEND
HPSA Wizard – 2004 Federal HPSA Deisgnations

- Becomes or is already full HPSA
- Remains partial HPSA
- Not a HPSA
- Status Not Available
- County
- FM
- FPG
- FSM
- GP

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