

Report: Number of doctors in Arizona below national average

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By The Associated Press

MESA -- The number of physicians in Arizona is below the national average and is not keeping pace with the state's surging population, a new report shows.

Arizona had a ratio of 208 doctors for every 100,000 people last year compared to the national average of 283 physicians, according to the report released Monday and completed jointly by the W.P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University and the University of Arizona Health Sciences Center.

"It's concerning that we have far less (physicians) than are available nationwide. It would suggest we have a greater need for physicians," said Dr. Mary Rimsza, an ASU research professor who helped compile the report. "I think it should raise concerns to the public about whether they have enough doctors in the state."

With a limited number of medical schools and residency programs, Arizona will need to continue to draw the bulk of its physicians from other states, researchers of the report say.

Researchers are working on a second phase of the study, which will examine physician productivity and the population's health care needs.

Without more physicians, patients will continue to pack doctors' offices, surgery schedules and emergency departments, said Dan Mitten, associate executive director of the Maricopa County Medical Society.

"We're increasing our population by millions of individuals and the number of physicians is growing slowly. Physicians aren't prepared for that volume of patients," Mitten said. "Getting into your physician will get harder and harder. Those are signs of what's to come."

The report says Arizona exceeds the national average for the number of primary care specialists, with 41 percent of doctors practicing family medicine compared with 38 percent nationwide.

However, the number is expected to decline in Arizona with the decreased number of residency positions available in family medicine.

The report says the number of primary care physicians, hospital-based physicians and surgeons has grown since 1992 but the number of physicians practicing in allergy, cardiovascular diseases, endocrinology, gastroenterology, hematology, and infectious disease has decreased.

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