



Graduate Medical Education

The National Association of Spine Specialists (NASS) supports increasing the number of federally funded residency slots to address workforce shortages in many specialties and eliminating the current graduate medical education funding restrictions. An appropriate supply of well-educated and trained physicians is essential to ensure timely access to quality health care services for all Americans. The growing physician workforce shortage must be addressed to maintain a workforce that is of sufficient size and specialty mix.

ONGOING CONCERNS: According to a 2016 study, the United States will face an overall shortage of between 46,000-90,000 physicians by 2025. This includes a shortfall of roughly 14,900 and 35,600 primary care physicians and 61,700 and 94,700 specialists.

Specialty physicians require up to seven years of post-graduate residency training. By the time a true crisis manifests itself, we will be unable to quickly correct it. The country's severe physician workforce shortage will only continue to worsen as insurance coverage expands to millions of Americans and the baby boomers continue to reach retirement. We must take steps now to ensure a fully trained specialty physician workforce for the future.

LEGISLATIVE RESPONSE: NASS supports addressing the workforce shortage and graduate medical education, including the following legislation pending in Congress:

H.R. 1006, "Building a Health Care Workforce for the Future Act" introduced by Rep. Raul Ruiz (D-CA) and Rep. David McKinley (R-WV). The legislation would strengthen the health care workforce by improving core competencies and providing grants to states for medical scholarship programs to encourage health professionals to stay and practice in the state. The state scholarship retention program accommodates both specialty and primary care medical scholarship programs, and the core competencies provision would help to foster innovation in the training of both primary and specialty care physicians.

H.R. 2124/S. 1148, "Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2015" introduced by Rep. Joseph Crowley (D-NY) and Rep. Charles Boustany (R-LA) and by Sen. Bill Nelson (D-FL) and Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY). The legislation would increase the number of Medicare supported residency positions nationally by 3,000 annually over 5 years (15,000 slots in total) and requires half of all available slots be used to train residents in a shortage specialty residency programs. In addition, the bill directs the National Health Care Workforce Commission to study the physician workforce and specifies the process for distributing positions.

H.R. 4774, "Training Tomorrow's Doctors Today Act" introduced by Rep. Kathy Castor (D-FL). The legislation would increase the number of graduate medical education residency positions by 15,000 over the next 5 years and introduce accountability and transparency initiatives for institutions receiving Medicare funding for physician training.