

SOCIAL IMPEDIMENTS TO HEALTH PERVASIVE, WASHINGTON PHYSICIANS SAY

By Kurt Mosley

Eighty-eight percent of physicians nationally indicate that some, many or all of their patients are affected by a social condition such as poverty, unemployment, lack of education, or drug addiction that poses a serious impediment to their health, according to a new survey. Among Washington physicians completing the survey, the number is 91%.

These are among key findings of a major new survey of 8,772 physicians commissioned by [The Physicians Foundation](#), a nonprofit organization that seeks to advance the work of practicing physicians and help facilitate the delivery of healthcare to patients. The survey was conducted for The Physicians Foundation by Merritt Hawkins, the nation's leading physician search and consulting firm.

Titled *2018 Survey of America's Physicians: Practice Patterns and Perspectives*, the research underscores the prevalence of social conditions undermining the health and well-being of many Americans.

The survey's findings align with [recent reports](#) tying social determinants of health to declining life expectancy rates in the U.S. and to [research](#) showing the connection between poverty and relatively high rates of healthcare spending in the U.S. compared to other developed nations.

Cracks in the Physician/Hospital Relationship.

The wide -angling survey also asked physicians about their morale, practice metrics, practice plans and how they feel about the physician/hospital relationship. Over 57% of physicians nationally said they do not believe that the employment of physicians by hospitals is likely to enhance quality of care or decrease costs. For Washington physicians, the number was lower at 52%.

Over 46% of physicians nationally described the physician/hospital relationship as somewhat or mostly negative. For Washington physicians, the number was 41%, suggesting that physician/hospital relations in Washington are more favorable than in many other states. Nevertheless, these findings underscore the fact that physician/hospital alignment cannot always be achieved merely by employing physicians. More communication and cooperation may be necessary before this key relationship can be considered truly symbiotic (for more information on this topic see the Merritt Hawkins' white paper *Ten Keys to Enhancing Physician/Hospital Relations and Reducing Physician Burnout and Turnover*).

At Capacity or Overextended

When asked to describe their practices, over 79% of physicians nationally said they are either at capacity or are overextended and therefore unable to see more patients or take on more duties. For Washington physicians, the number was higher at 86%. Close to 62% of physicians nationally described their professional morale as somewhat or mostly negative. For Washington physicians, the number was 58%, a favorable metric compared to national averages.

The survey includes many other data points derived from dozens of questions that reveal the average number of hours physicians work, the average number of patients they see, what changes they plan to make in their practices and a variety of other topics. Results of the survey broken out by all physicians and by Washington physicians are available to WHA members by contacting Ben Adams, Merritt Hawkins' Senior Marketing Consultant, at ben.adams@merrithawkins.com.

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