

The Changing Practice Patterns of Obstetricians/ Gynecologists in New York State

New York Center for Health Workforce Studies, University at Albany, State University of New York

Robert Martiniano, M.P.A., M.P.H.; Jean Moore, M.S.N.; David Armstrong, B.A.; Tracey Continelli, B.A.; Sandra McGinnis, Ph.D.; and Gaetano Forte, B.A.

Background

Obstetricians/gynecologists (Ob/Gyns) are physicians who specialize in women's reproductive health, providing medical and surgical care to women, with expertise in pregnancy, childbirth, and disorders of the reproductive system.

Ob/Gyn practice patterns have changed in the past ten years, and it has been suggested that these differences are fueled by changing provider characteristics, high malpractice premium rates, and a lessening demand for obstetrical services.

Methodology

To understand this issue more fully, the Center for Health Workforce Studies analyzed a number of different secondary data sources, including:

- Natality Detail File (1995 and 1999);
- New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Birth Master Public Use File (1995, 1999, and 2003);
- New York State Physician Licensure Re-Registration Survey data (1995 - 2005);
- New York State Resident Exit Survey (1998/99, 2000/01, 2002/03); and
- New York State State-wide Planning and Research Cooperative System (SPARCS) data.

Findings

The overall supply of Ob/Gyns in the state declined between 2000 and 2004. In addition, the distribution of Ob/Gyns in the state changed over that time period, with some regions experiencing a sharp drop in the number of active Ob/Gyns.

Between 2000 and 2004, the overall number of Ob/Gyns¹ in New York declined by 4%. The number of Ob/Gyns declined in six of ten regions, with the Mohawk Valley experiencing the largest drop at 43%, followed by the Southern Tier at 33%, and Western New York at 20%. In contrast, the North Country showed the largest increase in the number of Ob/Gyns at 22%, followed by the Capital District at 21%.

About the Center

The Center for Health Workforce Studies is based in the School of Public Health, University at Albany, State University of New York. The Center conducts studies of the supply, demand, use, and education of the health workforce and is committed to collecting and analyzing data to understand workforce dynamics and trends. One of the Center's primary goals is to inform public policy makers, the health and education sectors, and the public on health workforce issues. For more information and an inventory of the Center's reports and publications, please visit the Center's website at: <http://chws.albany.edu>.

Number of Ob/Gyns and Percent Change by Region, 2000 and 2004

Region	2000	2004	Percent Change
Capital District	81	98	21%
Central New York	67	72	8%
Finger Lakes	132	122	-8%
Hudson Valley	298	292	-2%
Long Island	339	367	8%
Mohawk Valley	34	19	-43%
New York City	1,165	1,100	-6%
North Country	32	38	22%
Southern Tier	79	53	-33%
Western New York	142	114	-20%
Statewide	2,368	2,275	-4%

The total number of births and the birth rates declined in New York between 1995 and 2003.

Between 1995 and 2003, both the number of births and the birth rate per 1,000² fell in New York State, in New York City, and in non-New York City counties. Simultaneously, the percentage of total births delivered by Caesarian-section increased in New York City and statewide but decreased in non-New York City counties.

Total Population, Number of Women between 15 and 44, Total Births, and the number of C-Sections for 1995, 1999, and 2003

	1995		1999		2003	
	New York City	Non-NYC Counties	New York City	Non-NYC Counties	New York City	Non-NYC Counties
Total Population	7,329,079	10,811,815	7,322,564	10,668,214	8,109,626	11,102,799
Women 15-44	1,754,004	2,368,112	1,730,087	2,291,872	1,877,656	2,283,620
Total Births	126,163	146,133	119,179	137,959	119,466	133,388
Births per 1,000 Women 15-44	71.9	61.7	68.9	60.2	63.6	58.4
Total Caesarian-sections	24,145	37,460	23,802	36,901	27,488	31,854
Percent of Total Births	19.1%	25.6%	20.0%	26.7%	23.0%	23.9%

Sources: Natality Detail File, 1995 & 1999; NYS Department of Health

The number of hospitals providing regular obstetrical services declined between 1995 and 2003, as did the number of certified hospital-based obstetrical beds.

The number of hospitals providing regular obstetrical services³ declined between 1995 and 2003. Fourteen hospitals in the State discontinued regular obstetrical services between 1995 and 2003, while three hospitals added regular obstetrical services. Additionally, the number of certified hospital-based obstetrical beds in New York declined nearly 10% between 1995 and 2003, with the number of these beds decreasing in New York City by more than 14% and in non-New York City counties by almost 2%.

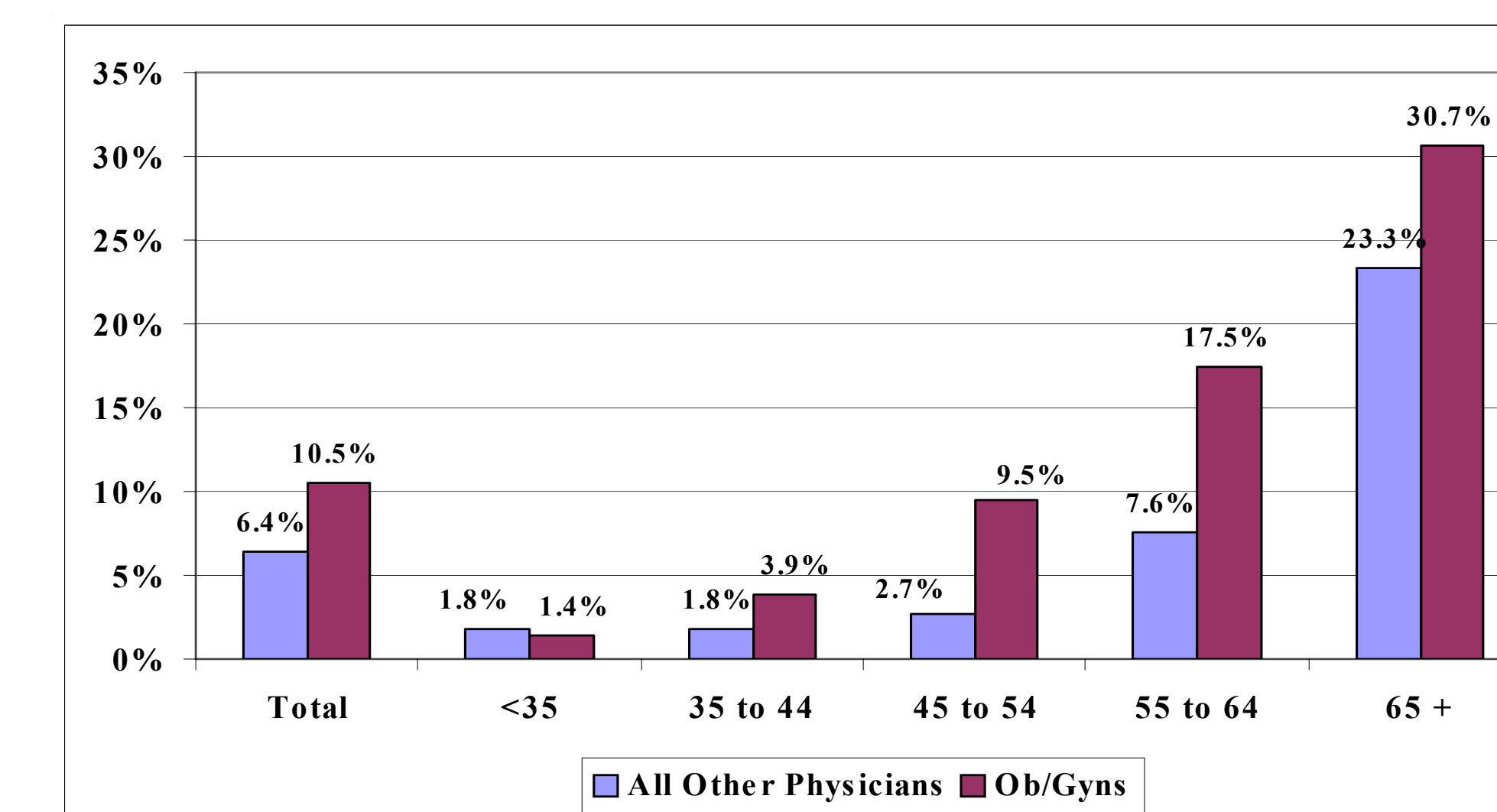
Between 1999 and 2003, newly trained Ob/Gyns reported increasing difficulty finding satisfactory positions and reported receiving fewer job offers.

In an analysis of responses from the Center's 1999 and 2003 Resident Exit Surveys, newly trained Ob/Gyns reported having more difficulty finding satisfactory jobs in 2003 than in 1999. Newly trained Ob/Gyns also reported receiving fewer job offers both regionally and nationally than did newly trained physicians in other specialties.

In 2004 and 2005, a higher percentage of the state's Ob/Gyns reported plans to retire or reduce patient care hours, compared to other physician specialties.

Based on data from the New York State Physician Licensure Re-registration Survey for the years 2004 and 2005, more than 10% of all Ob/Gyns reported plans to retire or reduce hours, a rate that was substantially higher than for most other specialties. Although plans to retire or reduce hours are clearly age-related in many medical specialties, Ob/Gyns reported such plans at much higher rates in younger age groups.

Percent of Ob/Gyns Planning to Reduce Hours or Retire by Age



Discussion

There are a confluence of factors that appear to be influencing the practice of Ob/Gyns and may signal a future shortage of Ob/Gyns. These factors include:

- The number of births and the birth rate are dramatically declining, especially in upstate regions.
- Fewer hospitals are providing obstetrical services, and the number of obstetrical beds statewide has decreased.
- There were fewer Ob/Gyns in New York in 2004 than there were in 2000, with a number of upstate regions showing a substantial decline in the number of practicing Ob/Gyns.
- Newly trained Ob/Gyns reported that both national and regional demand weakened between 1999 and 2003. Newly trained Ob/Gyns found fewer available jobs and indicated more difficulty finding satisfactory positions.

¹ Physicians who limited their practice to gynecological only were excluded from this analysis.

² Rate per 1,000 is based on women of childbearing ages, 15 to 44.

³ Hospitals that may provide emergency deliveries, but with no certified obstetrical beds, were not included in the count of hospitals with regular obstetrical services.