

Evaluating Changes in Compensation of Primary Care Physicians since Affordable Care Act

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the years there have been many changes to the healthcare system, but the Affordable Care Act (ACA) may have had the largest impact on the compensation of physicians. This study will examine how the compensation of Primary Care Physicians (PCPs) has changed since the ACA was implemented. First this study will give a brief introduction and overview to history of healthcare and the ACA. Then factors that affect PCP compensation will be determined. In addition, responses regarding the satisfaction of PCPs will be compared between a survey prior to, and two surveys after the ACA was implemented.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the Affordable Care Act in 2010 has arguably been the biggest change to the American healthcare system. However, while this act has helped millions of Americans, it has also dramatically increased the number of patients for PCPS, and may take a toll on the healthcare system. Primary Care Physicians are the physicians that have been most affected by the Affordable Care Act. The dramatic increase in the demand for PCPs, various satisfaction ratings, and salary are used to determine how the compensation of PCPS has changed since the ACA was implemented.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main materials that were used in this study were various sources for physician satisfaction and compensation. Three surveys were obtained by the "The Physicians' Foundation": "The Physicians' Perspective: Medical Practice in 2008", "A Survey of America's Physicians: Practice Patterns and Perspectives" in 2012, and "2014 Survey Of America's Physicians Practice Patterns and Perspectives". These surveys were used to determine how compensation changed before and after the ACA. A linear regression was then done with variables from these surveys and comparable variables from Medscape Compensation Reports.

Table 1. Changes in Primary Care Physician Morale regarding the current state of medical profession, obtained from various surveys from the Physicians Foundation.

	2008	2012	2014
Very Positive	5.90%	4.5%	10.20%
Somewhat Positive	29.77%	32%	40%
Somewhat Negative	47.62%	43.40%	34.90%
Very Negative	16.71%	20.10%	14.90%

RESULTS

This study focused on factors such as satisfaction, workload, income and effects of the ACA when examining changes in PCP compensation. While various satisfaction levels have fluctuated before and after the ACA, there has been an overall upward trend and PCPS feel more optimistic now than before the ACA was introduced (which is most likely because physicians now feel more comfortable with the effects of the ACA). Overall the results from the regression were not significant, which is most likely due to the small sample size and lack of variation.

Figure 2: Regression Information
 Model for income and satisfaction:
 Income = f(morale, overall satisfaction, satisfaction with medicine as a career)
 Regression Equation: $Y = 183,925.6 - 162,401X_1 - 118,386X_2 + 195,972X_3$
 Adjusted R squared: 0.126748

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.707813
R Square	0.500999
Adjusted R	0.126748
Standard Error	14832.46
Observations	8

	Coefficients	P-value
Y-intercept	183925.6	0.253898
X-Variable 1	-162401	0.666459
X-Variable 2	-118386	0.508729
X-Variable 3	195972	0.160567

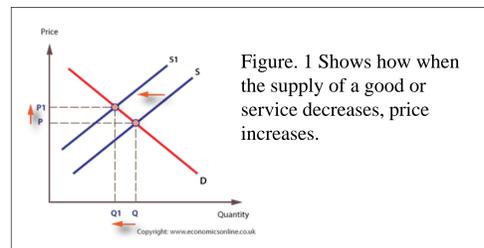


Table 2. Changes in weather or not Primary Care Physicians would recommend medicine as a career to younger people obtained from the Physicians Foundation

	2008	2012	2014
Yes	40.05%	47.3%	53.8%
No	59.95%	52.7%	46.2%

Table 7. Information about various PCPs salaries from 2008 until 2014 from various editions of "Reviews of Physician and Advanced Practitioner Recruiting Incentives"

	Family Medicine	Internal Medicine	Pediatrics	Average
2008	\$173,000	\$186,000	\$171,000	\$176,667
2009	\$175,000	\$191,000	\$180,000	\$182,000
2010	\$178,000	\$205,000	\$183,000	\$188,667
2011	\$189,000	\$203,000	\$189,000	\$193,667
2012	\$185,000	\$208,000	\$179,000	\$190,667
2013	\$199,000	\$198,000	\$188,000	\$195,000
2014	\$198,000	\$207,000	\$195,000	\$200,000

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CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the Affordable Care Act has changed the way primary care physicians have been compensated, and this study attempted to show how factors such as physician satisfaction, workload, and salary affect the compensation of PCPS. While the economic regression that was conducted showed a weak correlation between satisfaction factors and income, this was due to the small sample size that was analyzed. Though this study contained responses from thousands of PCPs, they were only represented as eight points because the responses were averaged in each of the eight surveys (five editions of the "Medscape Compensation Reports", and the responses from "The Physicians' Foundation").

In addition there are several other variables that may have affected physician compensation that were not measured in this study. For example, happiness at home, physician health, and burnout rate for physicians should also be included and analyzed for future research. Also future studies may show new developments on how physicians' attitudes towards the ACA will continue to change over time.

The introduction of the ACA represented a major change in the way PCPs will be compensated in the future. This was the first step that moved physician payment away from the traditional fee-for-service model and towards new models that focus on performance and results. These new models are intended to increase quality of care and efficiency, and it seems likely that a pay-for-performance model will soon become the norm.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my SIP advisor Dr. Hultberg for his guidance and encouragement of my SIP. I would also like to thank my parents for all the encouragement and support they have given me during my life. Lastly I would like to thank my brother Prasanth.