The Impact of COVID-19 on Health Care Provider Mobility and Turnover

Steve Petterson, Qian "Eric" Luo, Candice Chen, Yoon Hong Park

ABSTRACT: This study uses Medicare Provider Enrollment Chain and Ownership System (PECOS) data to develop methods that permit the tracking of movements of healthcare providers as close to "real-time" as possible. We examined the movement of U.S. physicians, advanced practice nurses, and physician assistants using two major datasets: 1) PECOS, the administrative system Medicare uses to enroll providers and supplies to receive reimbursement, and 2) Doctors and Clinicians, which includes information on providers who had a new Medicare enrollment, reassignment, or new practice addresses in the past six months and providers who billed Medicare in the past six months. Between April 2017 and March 2023, PECOS analysis showed that the number of new enrollments of existing physicians (suggesting movement across states) grew over time, with a spike at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (April 2020 to March 2021). Doctors and Clinicians analysis, which has the advantage of being backed by claims, also showed increased state-to-state movement of internal medicine and family medicine physicians post-COVID, increased movement of family medicine physicians and physician assistants but not internal medicine physicians and APRNs in the first year of COVID (2020) and overall movement to larger organizations, suggesting an increasing trend in healthcare consolidation. This study demonstrates that existing datasets can be used to better track healthcare provider movement, and movement appears to be increased post-COVID, although not consistently between specialties and professions.

Key Words: health workforce, COVID-19