

Geriatric Patients and Providers: An Assessment of Needs, Education, and Retention in Rural Kansas

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Introduction. Physicians raised in rural areas comprise many rural physicians today; however, provider shortages remain abundant. As the rural population ages, shortages among geriatric providers are especially concerning. This project seeks to determine (1) geriatric patient needs and access to medical care across rural Kansas by survey of their providers and (2) geriatric care provider needs, education, and retention. We hypothesize lack of transportation will be the most common geriatric patient need and that most rural geriatric physicians remain in rural practice due to having a rural upbringing, finding relationships with patients the most desirable aspect of their practice.

Methods. Rural providers were surveyed at STORM program sites across rural Kansas. Data from cross sectional surveys was collected and summary statistics were performed, such as frequencies and percentages, for each survey item.

Results. Cost is the greatest obstacle for geriatric patients to access healthcare. Geriatric providers most desire access to mental healthcare and find workforce availability to be the greatest obstacle in their rural practices. Additionally, 76% of providers had a rural upbringing, with 68% planning to retire in their current community. Providers indicated relationships with patients as most desirable factor in their practice, with 62% of providers believing they could not achieve these same practice values in an urban setting.

Conclusions. By prioritizing the needs of providers, efforts can be made to improve patient outcomes, the desirability to reside in a rural community. Further studies can investigate factors in rural communities that correlate with improved physician retention.