The Production of Rural Female Generalists by U.S. Medical Schools

**Background:** Women comprise an increasing proportion of medical school graduates but tend to practice in urban locations. Consequently, concerns have been raised about persistent shortages of physicians in rural areas and the degree to which medical schools address these shortages. This study compares the production of rural female generalists among medical schools.

**Methods:** Data from the 1996 AMA Physician Masterfile for the 1988-96 graduate cohort were analyzed to compare the production of rural female generalists by medical school. Outcome measures included total number and percentage of rural female generalist graduates of each school.

**Results:** The number of listed rural female generalist graduates among schools ranged from 0 to 37 (0 to 7.8% of each school’s 1988-96 graduates). There were approximately twice as many male as female rural generalists. A lower percentage of the female generalist graduates (5.1%) than of the male graduates (5.8%) were practicing in rural areas (i.e., 14% fewer). This differential is much greater for more remote small towns. Publicly-funded schools produced relatively far more rural female generalists than their private-school counterparts. Some 50 medical schools produced five or fewer female generalists from their graduating classes (41% of schools and 16% of female graduates). By contrast, the top producing 20 percent of the schools accounted for 42 percent of the production (23 of these 24 schools were public).

**Conclusions:** Only a few schools contribute most of the rural female generalists. These schools’ admissions policies, curricula, extracurricular programs, and career advising efforts may serve as models of schools who make it a priority to encourage more of their female graduates to enter rural practice. Federal and state policy makers should use fiscal incentives to support the production of female rural generalists and require accountability on the part of the medical schools.

**Products:** Findings from this study are described in WWAMI RHRC Working Paper #52: Ellsberry KE, Doescher MP, Hart LG, January 1999.