

For Immediate Release:

**SURVEY: MANY NEW PHYSICIANS
WOULD TURN AWAY FROM MEDICINE**

Though Jobs Plentiful, One in Four Would Select Another Field

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DALLAS, TEXAS – Close to one in four newly trained physicians would select a field other than medicine if they could begin their careers again, according to a new survey by Merritt, Hawkins, & Associates, a Dallas-based physician search and consulting firm.

“Before they even enter the world of professional practice, many newly trained physicians are wondering why they didn’t chart a different course,” notes Joseph Hawkins, Merritt, Hawkins & Associates’ chief executive officer. “This should be an exciting time for doctors ‘coming out.’ Instead, many of them are already disillusioned with medicine.”

The survey examines the practice preferences and concerns of physicians in their final year of residency training. Merritt, Hawkins & Associates has conducted the survey every other year since 1991. The 2003 Survey of Final-Year Medical Residents indicates that 24% of physicians in their final year of training would select a field other than medicine if they could begin their careers again. By contrast, only 5% of physicians responding to the 2001 survey indicated they would select a field other than medicine. Prior to this year, no more than 11% of residents surveyed by Merritt, Hawkins & Associates in any given year have indicated they would select a career other than medicine.

What has changed? Hawkins points to the malpractice crisis as a factor contributing to the negativity of newly trained physicians. Over 60% of residents surveyed indicated that malpractice is causing them a significant level of concern as they consider entering professional practice. In 2001, only 15% of residents indicated malpractice was a significant concern. The rise in malpractice rates that has occurred since the 2001 survey, and the resulting turmoil it has caused in the medical profession, have been duly noted by newly trained physicians, Hawkins observes. In addition, 60% of residents surveyed indicated that dealing with managed care and other payors is a significant cause of concern, up from 25% in 2001. More physicians surveyed in 2003 are concerned about their availability of free time, their level of education debt, and the depth of their medical knowledge than has been the case in the past.

“It isn’t just one thing,” Hawkins notes. “It’s the cumulative weight of what new physicians experience in training, what they read and see, and particularly what they hear from veteran physicians. The doctor uncle who used to encourage his nephew to try medicine now is doing just the opposite.”

Job Market Never Better

The irony, Hawkins observes, is that the job market for new physicians has never been better. Close to 70% of residents surveyed in 2003 indicated they had received 51 or more job solicitations in the course of their residency training, compared to only 21% of residents in specialty training interviewed in 2001. Over 40% of residents surveyed in 2003 indicated they had received 101 or more job solicitations during their training, compared to only 7% of residents in specialty training interviewed in 2001. The level of recruitment activity aimed at medical residents has never been higher in the history of the survey, according to Hawkins. The high volume of recruitment activity directed towards residents underscores the shortage of specialist physicians that has been building in recent years due to a growing population, population aging, new procedures, new drug therapies, and a variety of other factors.

“The job market is better for physicians today than it is for any other type of professional,” Hawkins says. “By rights, this should be an optimistic time for new physicians, but for many it is not.”

A new question added to the 2003 survey indicates an additional area of concern for many newly trained physicians. Close to 50% of residents surveyed indicated they are not prepared to handle the business side of medicine, including employment contracts, compensation arrangements and related matters. Over half of residents surveyed indicated they had received no formal training in business related issues during their residencies, and 46% indicated that lack of such training or knowledge was a significant cause for concern.

A free copy of the 2003 Survey of Final Year Medical Residents may be obtained by calling Merritt, Hawkins & Associates at (800) 876-0500 or access the firm’s web site at www.merrithawkins.com.