

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

PHYSICIAN SHORTAGES: TRUTH OR FICTION?



By Stephen L. Bakke  May 21, 2014

Here's what provoked me:

Potential physician shortages is a controversial topic! An obviously competent and prominent physician made some points which I believe to be somewhat naïve and idealistic. He should stick to his doctoring.

Here's my response:

Physician shortages: truth or fiction?

Re: Opinion Exchange "Counterpoint" on May 20: Dr. Neil Shah, a prominent Minnesota dermatologist points out some important points: meeting future medical needs of our citizens requires making wiser use of our physicians' time and talents; and we must maintain the highest standards for admissions to medical schools.

I agree!

He points out that there's a popular view that a severe physician shortage looms, and that in order to meet the shortage we will need to lower medical school admission standards. I agree that we don't want to lower standards to cover shortages! But Dr. Shah still has some convincing to do on these points:

- He dismisses the likelihood of a physician shortage by assuming we will certainly find out how to use physicians more wisely.
- He seems to be of the opinion that numbers we are currently admitting to medical school includes all, and only, those applicants who will become qualified physicians. If we admit more, he seems to contend, we will certainly be lowering the high standards that currently exist.

My response:

- I think Dr. Shah's confidence in increased physician efficiency is ambitious, especially considering the influence the federal government intends to have on our health care system (think VA!). **We can't depend on the Feds to create an efficient system for dispensing medical care.**
- Regarding lowering the standards to admit more medical students. **He hasn't convinced me that the admissions committees have stopped at PRECISELY that point where all the properly qualified are admitted. I submit that there are qualified candidates still available!**

Accepting Dr. Shah's conclusions requires a leap of faith – but I'd certainly trust him with my medical care!