



## Practice Characteristics of the Established Physician Workforce in South Carolina: 2009 - 2015

In 2015, there were 10,239 established physicians actively practicing in South Carolina, an increase of 1,624 (19%) over the 2009 workforce.<sup>1</sup> This report explores how employment status, type of practice setting, hours worked each week, and number of practice sites have changed over the period from 2009 to 2015, with an emphasis on these characteristics in 2015. All information is summarized from data provided by physicians when renewing their license to practice in either 2009 or 2015.

### Changes in Employment Patterns

Physicians describe their employment status in terms of self-employment or as an organizational employee. In 2009 69% of established physicians identified as self-employed either in a solo or group practice. In just 6 years the percent had dropped to 57% and the actual number of self-employed physicians had decreased. The following two tables show the change in both numbers and in the way physicians were distributed across different employment characteristics.

| Established Physicians by Employer Type                      | Counts:      |               | Growth Rate % | Year Percentages |             |
|--|--------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|-------------|
|  | 2009         | 2015          |               | 2009             | 2015        |
| Self Employed  | 5,976        | 5,866         | -2%           | 69.4%            | 57.3%       |
| Other Private Employer                                       | 1,177        | 2,498         | 112%          | 13.7%            | 24.4%       |
| State Government   | 1,051        | 1,115         | 6%            | 12.2%            | 10.9%       |
| County Government  | 171          | 389           | 127%          | 2.0%             | 3.8%        |
| Federal Civilian Agency (Including US Public Health Service) | 105          | 160           | 52%           | 1.2%             | 1.6%        |
| Residency/Intern Training                                    | 101          | 85            | -16%          | 1.2%             | 0.8%        |
| Non-Profit Health Agency                                     | 20           | 46            | 130%          | 0.2%             | 0.4%        |
| Individual Practitioner or Practitioner Group                | -            | 32            | NA            |                  | 0.3%        |
| Other Employer Type  | 1            | 24            | NA            | 0.0%             | 0.2%        |
| Volunteer – No Employer                                      | 13           | 20            | 54%           | 0.2%             | 0.2%        |
| Missing/Unknown  | -            | 4             | NA            |                  | 0.0%        |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>8,615</b> | <b>10,239</b> | <b>19%</b>    | <b>100%</b>      | <b>100%</b> |

Note: A dash in this table refers to having small or no numbers in 2009 and thus not appropriate for a growth rate estimate.

| Self-Employed Physicians by Practice Structure | Counts       |              | Growth Rate % | Year Percentages |             |
|--|--------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|-------------|
|  | 2009         | 2015         |               | 2009             | 2015        |
| Group practice, same specialty                 | 4,509        | 4,453        | -1%           | 75.5%            | 75.9%       |
| Solo practice                                  | 1,016        | 878          | -14%          | 17.0%            | 15.0%       |
| Group practice, multi-specialty                | 451          | 535          | 19%           | 7.5%             | 9.1%        |
| <b>Total Self-Employed</b>                     | <b>5,976</b> | <b>5,866</b> | <b>-2%</b>    | <b>100%</b>      | <b>100%</b> |

## Primary Practice Setting

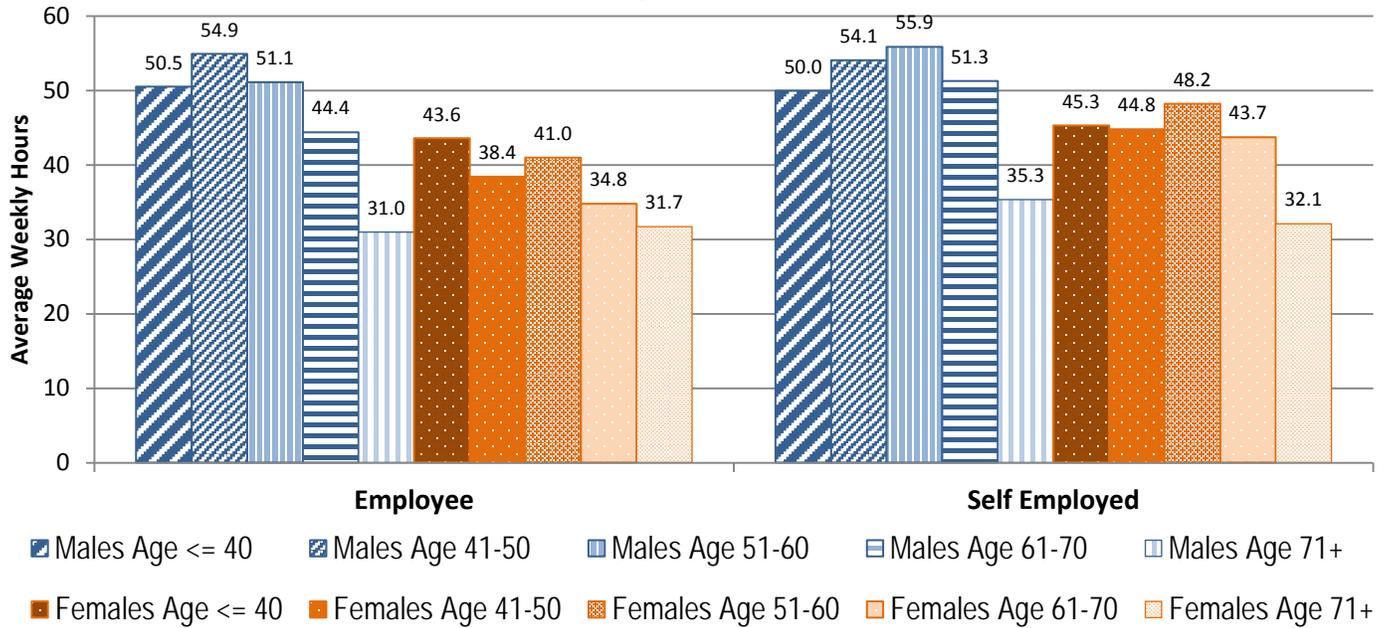
As the number of self-employed physicians was declining, a simultaneous shift occurred in the types of settings in which physicians practice. The number of established physicians whose primary practice was in a general hospital grew 66% from 2009 to 2015 while those whose primary setting was a private office grew by only 2% during that time. The table below shows the number of physicians and the distribution of the total workforce in each type of practice setting in 2009 and 2015, and the rate of growth or decline in the number practicing in those settings. Be aware that in the case of physicians practicing in private office settings, while the total count of physicians increased slightly between 2009 and 2015, the overall proportion of the physician workforce in private office settings decreased over that time period.

| Established Physicians by Practice Setting | Counts:      |               | Growth %     | Year Percentages |             |
|--|--------------|---------------|--------------|------------------|-------------|
|  | 2009         | 2015          |              | 2009             | 2015        |
| Private Office                             | 5,498        | 5,585         | 1.6%         | 63.8%            | 54.5%       |
| General Hospital                           | 1,651        | 2,739         | 65.9%        | 19.2%            | 26.8%       |
| University / College Of Medicine           | 663          | 861           | 29.9%        | 7.7%             | 8.4%        |
| Freestanding Outpatient Clinic             | 150          | 285           | 90.0%        | 1.7%             | 2.8%        |
| Emergency / Urgent Care Clinic             | 175          | 230           | 31.4%        | 2.0%             | 2.2%        |
| FQHC / Rural Clinic                        | 137          | 164           | 19.7%        | 1.6%             | 1.6%        |
| Outpatient Mental Health Clinic            | 118          | 112           | -5.1%        | 1.4%             | 1.1%        |
| Other Setting                              | 41           | 64            | 56.1%        | 0.5%             | 0.6%        |
| Psychiatric Hospital                       | 58           | 59            | 1.7%         | 0.7%             | 0.6%        |
| Business Establishment                     | 24           | 49            | 104.2%       | 0.3%             | 0.5%        |
| Administrative / Regulatory Health Agency  | 44           | 32            | -27.3%       | 0.5%             | 0.3%        |
| Freestanding Ambulatory Surgery Center     | 36           | 29            | -19.4%       | 0.4%             | 0.3%        |
| Rehabilitation Hospital                    | 10           | 8             | -20.0%       | 0.1%             | 0.1%        |
| Setting Not Reported                       | 10           | 22            | 120.0%       | 0.1%             | 0.2%        |
| <b>Total</b>                               | <b>8,615</b> | <b>10,239</b> | <b>18.9%</b> | <b>100%</b>      | <b>100%</b> |

## Hours Worked Per Week

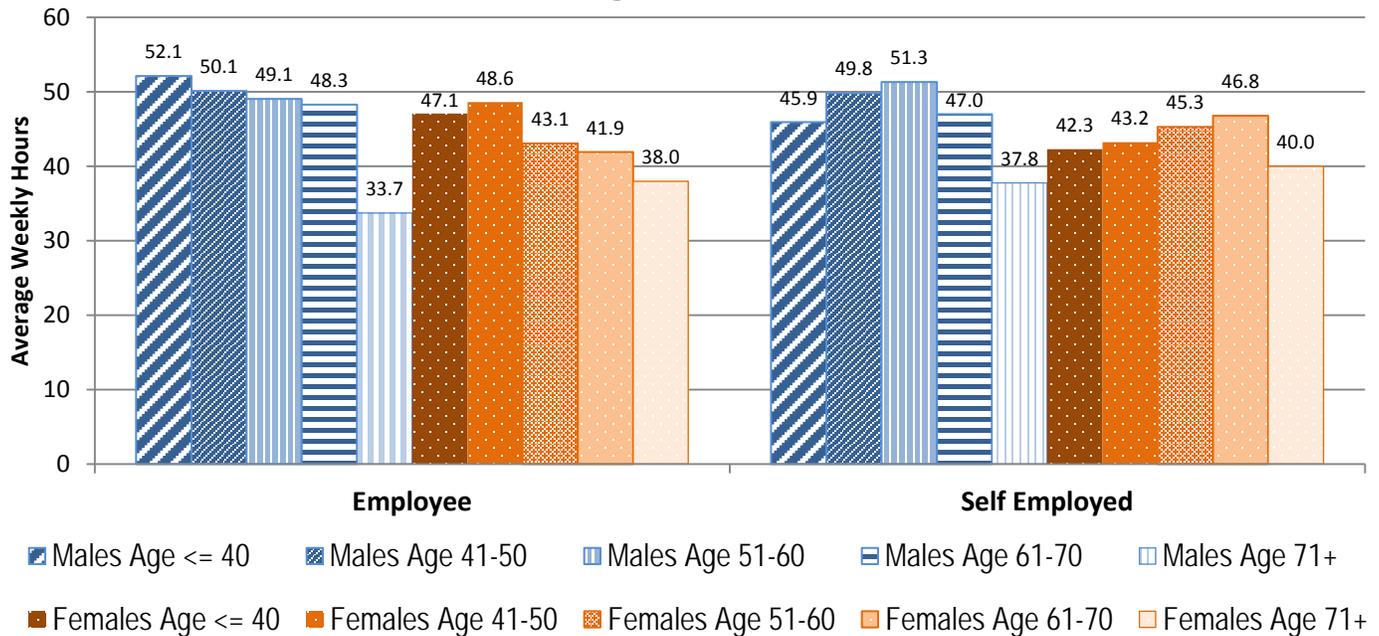
Physicians report the number of hours they work in an average week, as well as how many hours they spend on specific activities. This section reviews how physicians spend their time in different activities and how work hours differ by physician characteristics like age, gender, practice setting and employment status. These four factors (age, gender, setting and employment status) are inter-related and, due to the way the physician workforce is changing in South Carolina,<sup>2</sup> each contributes to an overall reduction in the total number of hours worked by physicians collectively, and thus the size of the full-time equivalent (FTE) workforce. The two charts on the next page illustrate the way work hours differed in 2015 by age, gender, and employment status in the two major settings in which physicians practice: ambulatory care settings (i.e. private offices, free-standing outpatient clinics, and community and rural clinics) and hospitals (i.e. general hospitals, psychiatric hospitals and rehabilitation hospitals).<sup>3</sup>

### Physicians in Ambulatory Settings - Average Hours per Week by Their Employment Status, Age and Gender - 2015



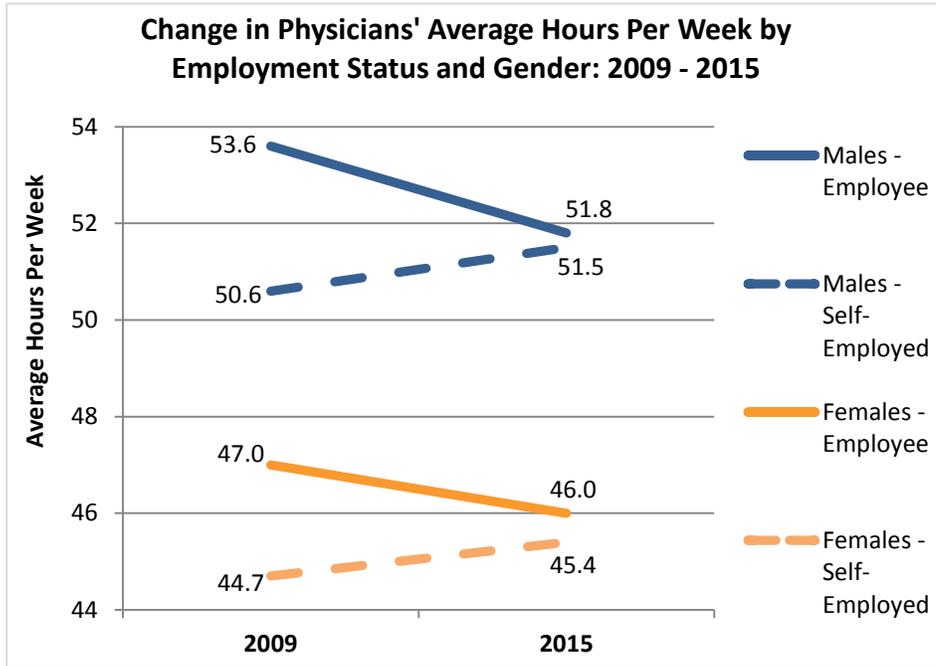
This information is based on established physicians whose primary practice was in an ambulatory care setting (private offices, free-standing outpatient clinics, and community and rural clinics) in South Carolina in 2015 and the total number of hours they reported working each week.

### Physicians in Hospital Settings - Average Hours per Week by Their Employment Status, Age and Gender - 2015



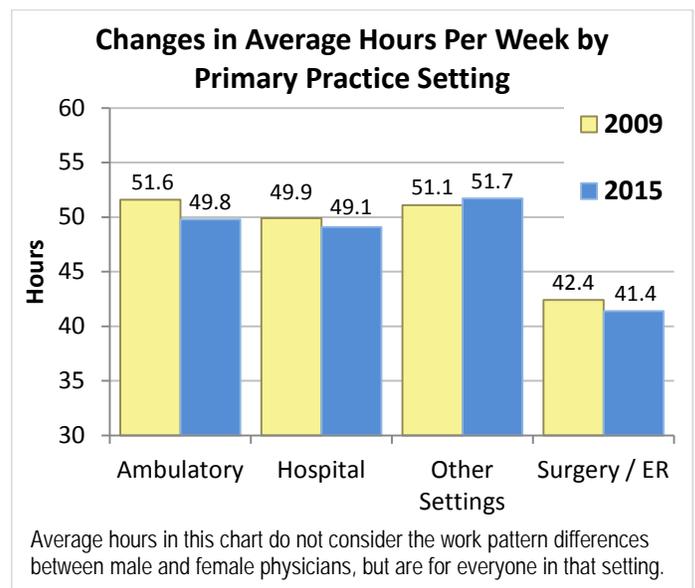
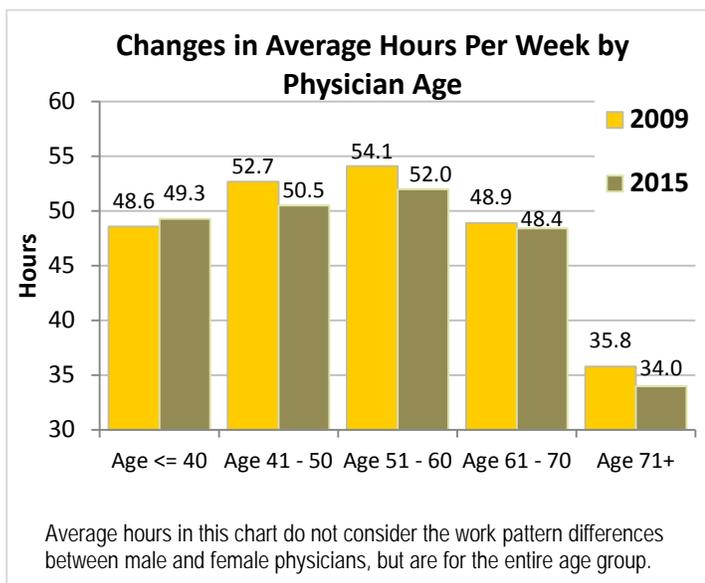
This information is based on established physicians whose primary practice setting was in a hospital (general hospitals, psychiatric hospitals and rehabilitation hospitals) in South Carolina in 2015 and the total number of hours they reported working each week. Those who reported their setting as surgery, emergency or urgent care are not included.

The charts on the previous page clearly show that female physicians – as a group – tend to work a few hours less each week than their male colleagues even when controlling for age, setting and employment status. That pattern was true in both 2009 and in 2015.



The chart to the left shows how average work hours per week have been changing in recent years. The average number of work hours for both male and female physicians who were self-employed increased very slightly (less than an hour) between 2009 and 2015, while the average for those who were employees declined slightly: 1.8 hours per week for men and 1 hour for women. As more physicians become organizational employees the downward trend in hours has a greater impact on the entire workforce.

Physician age also has an impact on work patterns, independent of gender and employment status. The chart below and to the left shows that physicians over the age of 40 have reduced the length of their work week in recent years. The chart on the right reflects those reductions within setting types. The primary drivers of this phenomenon are the aging of the largest generational cohort in the physician workforce (the Baby Boomers), and the increasing number of female physicians - who are mostly in the youngest age groups. Changes in employment setting and ownership are also contributory, but to a lesser extent.



### Hours by Activity Type

The table below summarizes the average number of hours per week that established South Carolina physicians spend in various activities, and the percentage of all physicians that reported spending at least 1 hour per week in a specific activity. The results show a decrease between 2009 and 2015 in the amount of time physicians spend on patient care activities and teaching, and a slight increase in the time spent on administration. The columns to the far right in the table reveal that the percentage of physicians engaged in direct care activities did not change, but the percent engaged in administrative duties and in training activities increased.

| Physician Activity | Average Hours per Activity Each Week |             | Change in Hours | Percent of Physicians Engaged in Each Activity |      |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|--|------|
|                    | 2009                                 | 2015        |                 | 2009   | 2015 |
| Patient Care       | 43.3                                 | 41.0        | -2.3            | 98%  | 98%  |
| Administration     | 3.9                                  | 4.2         | 0.3             | 49%  | 56%  |
| Teaching           | 1.9                                  | 1.7         | -0.2            | 25%  | 26%  |
| Research           | 0.8                                  | 0.8         | 0.0             | 11%  | 12%  |
| Training           | 0.7                                  | 0.7         | 0.0             | 7%   | 18%  |
| Other Activities   | 0.4                                  | 0.5         | 0.1             | 5%   | 10%  |
| <b>Total Hours</b> | <b>51.0</b>                          | <b>48.9</b> | <b>-2.1</b>     |  |      |

### Number of Practice Sites and Counties

The majority of South Carolina physicians practice at only one site and in only one county. However, the table below shows that between 2009 and 2015 a greater absolute number of physicians, and a greater proportion of the entire physician workforce in South Carolina began practicing at more than one practice location and in more than one county. The medical specialty groups in which at least 25% have more than one practice site in 2015 include psychiatry (25%), gastroenterology (26%), pediatric cardiology (27%), ophthalmology (27%), urology (29%), and child and adolescent psychiatry (34%).

| Physicians reported having: | 2009               |                      |                       |                     | 2015               |                      |                       |                     |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
|                             | In a single county | In multiple counties | Total # of physicians | % of 2009 Workforce | In a single county | In multiple counties | Total # of physicians | % of 2015 Workforce |
| 1 Practice Site             | 7,406              | -                    | 7,406                 | 86.0%               | 8,559              | -                    | 8,559                 | 83.6%               |
| 2 Practice Sites            | 457                | 466                  | 923                   | 10.7%               | 618                | 695                  | 1,313                 | 12.8%               |
| 3 Practice Sites            | 61                 | 225                  | 286                   | 3.3%                | 74                 | 293                  | 367                   | 3.6%                |
| <b>Totals:</b>              | <b>7,924</b>       | <b>691</b>           | <b>8,615</b>          | <b>100%</b>         | <b>9,251</b>       | <b>988</b>           | <b>10,239</b>         | <b>100%</b>         |

## Hospitalists

When the job of hospitalist first arose in the 1990s it was defined as a physician who would assume the care of hospitalized patients in place of their primary care physicians. Over time the definition has expanded. The Society of Hospital Medicine defines hospitalists as “physicians whose primary professional focus is the general medical care of hospitalized patients. Their activities include patient care, teaching, research, and leadership related to hospital medicine.”<sup>4</sup> Beginning in 2015, physicians in South Carolina were asked if their practice position could best be described as a hospitalist. The table below summarizes physicians’ answer to that question. More than half (59.9%) who said yes have a background in general internal medicine. Note that a small percentage of physicians in other traditional primary care specialties also appear to be practicing in hospitalist positions.

| Physician Specialty       | In your primary place of employment, would your position be best described as a Hospitalist? |              |            |               |             |
|---------------------------|--|--------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
|                           | Yes  | No           | No Answer  | Group N       | % yes       |
| General Internal Medicine | 462  | 1,225        | 126        | 1,813         | 25.5%       |
| Pediatrics                | 75   | 747          | 58         | 880           | 8.5%        |
| Family Medicine           | 68   | 1,341        | 60         | 1,469         | 4.6%        |
| Psychiatry                | 49   | 327          | 28         | 404           | 12.1%       |
| Obstetrics/Gynecology     | 16   | 514          | 24         | 554           | 2.9%        |
| All Other Sub-Specialists | 101  | 4,694        | 324        | 5,119         | 2.0%        |
| <b>Grand Total</b>        | <b>771</b>   | <b>8,848</b> | <b>620</b> | <b>10,239</b> | <b>8.0%</b> |

## End notes and references

<sup>1</sup> Counts of established physicians in 2009 and 2015 exclude physicians in residency or fellowship training programs and those whose primary practice is in a military or federal facility where care is restricted to military personnel.

<sup>2</sup> See “Changes in the Demographic Characteristics of the Physicians Workforce in South Carolina: 2009-2015” available at [www.SCOHW.org](http://www.SCOHW.org) under REPORTS or by searching for physician topics.

<sup>3</sup> Note that surgery and emergency departments or urgent care settings are not included in the hospital category.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from “What is a Hospitalist? In *The Hospitalist*, Feb. 2006. [www.the-hospitalist.org](http://www.the-hospitalist.org)

### Suggested Citation:

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