



## THERE IS AND WILL BE THE SHORTAGE OF DOCTORS/PHYSICIANS IN PAKISTAN: POINT TO PONDER.

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There is shortage of doctors globally and will probably continue in years to come. Here, we brief the situation of two countries United States of America (USA) and Pakistan. A report released in June 2021 by Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) "The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demands: Projection 2019-2034" has projected shortage between 37,800 and 124,000 by year 2034 in USA. It specifically mentions about shortage of primary-care-physicians between 17800 and 48000 and non-primary-care physicians including surgical-specialties, medical-specialties and other-specialties between 21000 and 77100. The report cites shortage of physicians impedes efforts to eliminate hurdles to provide high-quality care to populations and highlights how gaps will be filled.<sup>1</sup>

American Medical Association (AMA) President Gerald E. Harmon recommends to take immediate steps to safeguard the availability of required number of physicians to meet necessities of tomorrow as it can take about 10 years' to properly educate and train physicians.<sup>2</sup>

Pakistan is not far behind in planning in this aspect. Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination has produced Pakistan Human Resources for Health (HRH) Vision 2018-30. It mentions health workforce is the back bone of health system and economic growth but severe shortage of qualified healthcare professionals and workers is one of the main reasons hampers progress in health sector. The document states implementation of vision in two phases: phase-I from 2018-2022 and phase-II from 2023-2030 with indicators for both targets.<sup>3</sup> It will be known in 2023 whether targets of Phase-I have achieved or not.

One of the challenges documented is critical shortage of all cadres of staff including physicians. The required number of physicians including specialists with expected gaps are presented in table calculated as required minimum number in 2030 (@1.11/1000 population), registered stock in 2017, minimum production capacity between 2018-2030 and expected gap in 2030. The shortage by 2030 in Punjab including Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) will be 29, 243; in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including ex-federally administered tribal areas 18,824; in Baluchistan 14077 and; in Azad Jammu Kashmir (AKJ) 1857 while production in Sindh likely to exceed the

threshold. The total doctors needed will be 57999. Document also cites two main reasons for high attrition rate: 1) significant number of female doctors do not join the job after getting married due to family reasons and 2) migration of significant number of health professional's abroad.<sup>3</sup>

There are some shortcomings with regard to shortage of physician including specialist in HRH vision: 1). The data is not segregated in primary-care physician (family-physicians or general-practitioners) and non-primary-care physicians (surgical-specialties, medical-specialties and other-specialties such as public health, healthcare management). Hence, it is not clear how many doctors will be needed/produced in each category between 2018-2030 and how much gap will remain in each category by 2030, 2) how high attrition rate will be brought down especially in category of female doctors or any other mechanism will be adopted to bring parity in gender and, 3) how exceeded production in Sindh will be dealt with. These inadequacies may be sorted out before implementation of phase-II (2023-2030)

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