

**SJR 30 Briefing Paper**

Injured Worker Medical Care Access and Satisfaction With Care

In the

Montana Workers' Compensation System

Submitted to Jerry Keck, Administrator  
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Research Question: ***Does Montana Have Enough Physicians to Provide Needed Services To Workers?***

Answer: ***Probably not ( It would appear to be a systemic Montana problem and not just a problem related to the workers' compensation system.)***

According to the SJR 35 report entitled "Primary Care Issues and Health Care Reform" by Sue O'Connell dated September 11, 2009,

"...Montana still faces shortages of primary care physicians. A study by the Office of Rural Health at Montana State University shows that 33 of Montana's 56 counties have a lower ratio of primary care physicians to the patient population than the national average of one physician for every 1,160 residents.<sup>1</sup> Twelve counties have no primary care physicians, while nine have no physician at all.<sup>2</sup> Overall, 862 of the state's 2,139 licensed physicians are primary care physicians.<sup>3</sup>" This report also states on page 2, "According to the Department of Public Health and Human Services, all or parts of 55 of Montana's 56 counties are considered health professional shortage areas (HSPAs) for primary care."

And this is in spite of the existence of 326 physician assistants and 722 advanced practice registered nurses who also may provide some primary care.

Table 1 shows the physician (and primary care physician) concentration in Montana counties as of 2008 based on the active physicians in the 2008 Montana Medical Association's Directory of Montana Physicians; shows the population within each county<sup>4</sup>; and the resulting "physician per capita rate". Lastly, it demonstrates the number of primary care physicians per county<sup>5</sup> and the "per capita primary care physicians" per county. This information is also displayed in graphic form in Figure 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Saul M. J. Rivard, "Montana's Primary Care Workforce", *Montana State University Office of Rural Health/Area Health Education Center*, August 2009, P.3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, P.2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, P.6.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/30000.html> .

<sup>5</sup> Pediatricians have been eliminated from the primary care physician per capita listing for workers' compensation purposes as few injured workers would be treated by pediatricians.

Table 1

County	PHYSICIAN	PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS					POPULATION	Physicians Per Capita	Primary Care Phys. Per Capita*
	TOTAL	FM	GP	IM	PD	Total Prim. Care	per 100,000		
Beaverhead	13	5	0	3	0	8	8,903	146	90
Big Horn	11	8	0	1	1	10	12,841	86	70
Blaine	8	6	0	0	1	7	6,491	123	92
Broadwater	3	2	0	0	0	2	4,704	64	43
Carbon	11	6	2	0	0	8	9,657	114	83
Cascade	213	27	2	22	17	68	82,026	260	62
Carter	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,234	0	0
Chouteau	2	2	0	0	0	2	5,225	38	38
Custer	22	5	0	7	3	15	11,149	197	108
Daniels	1	1	0	0	0	1	1,643	61	61
Dawson	12	4	0	2	0	6	8,490	141	71
Deer Lodge	20	7	0	3	1	11	8,843	226	113
Fallon	2	2	0	0	0	2	2,716	74	74
Fergus	16	8	0	3	1	12	11,195	143	98
Flathead	225	38	2	29	8	77	88,473	254	78
Gallatin	202	55	0	18	8	81	89,824	225	81
Garfield	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,184	0	0
Glacier	14	12	0	0	1	13	13,297	105	90
Golden Valley	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,081	0	0
Granite	1	1	0	0	0	1	2,821	35	35
Hill	23	5	1	3	0	9	16,454	140	55
Jefferson	13	5	1	0	0	6	11,255	116	53
Judith Basin	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,014	0	0
Lake	33	18	0	3	1	22	28,690	115	73
Lewis & Clark	173	37	0	29	10	76	60,925	284	108
Liberty	3	3	0	0	0	3	1,725	174	174
Lincoln	27	13	1	3	2	19	18,971	142	90
Madison	6	3	0	0	0	3	7,509	80	40
McCone	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,676	0	0
Meagher	3	2	1	0	0	3	1,868	161	161
Mineral	3	1	0	1	0	2	3,862	78	52
Missoula	322	47	1	30	11	89	107,320	300	73
Musselshell	1	1	0	0	0	1	4,498	22	22
Park	22	8	1	3	1	13	16,189	136	74
Petroleum	0	0	0	0	0	0	436	0	0
Phillips	1	0	1	0	0	1	3,904	26	26
Pondera	5	4	0	0	0	4	5,852	85	68
Powder River	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,694	0	0
Powell	6	5	0	0	0	5	7,041	85	71

Prairie	1	1	0	0	0	1	1,064	94	94
Ravalli	55	19	0	6	1	26	40,664	135	61
Richland	12	3	0	3	0	6	9,270	129	65
Roosevelt	3	2	0	0	0	2	10,089	30	20
Rosebud	6	6	0	0	0	6	9,190	65	65
Sanders	12	9	0	0	0	9	11,034	109	82
Sheridan	2	2	0	0	0	2	3,283	61	61
Stillwater	4	3	0	0	0	3	8,687	46	35
Silver Bow	61	8	0	12	5	25	32,803	186	61
Sweetgrass	3	2	0	1	0	3	3,790	79	79
Teton	1	1	0	0	0	1	5,992	17	17
Toole	4	4	0	0	0	4	5,141	78	78
Treasure	0	0	0	0	0	0	637	0	0
Valley	10	5	0	1	0	6	6,892	145	87
Wheatland	2	2	0	0	0	2	2,010	100	100
Wibaux	0	0	0	0	0	0	866	0	0
Yellowstone	501	74	1	68	21	164	142,348	352	100
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,094</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>840</b>	<b>967,440</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>10</b>

- Pediatricians have been eliminated from the Primary Care category for workers' compensation purposes in the per capita column.

The physician per capita figures in Montana as a whole appear to be higher than some of the states in our region of the country and the states previously selected for comparison due to similar industry mix and demographics. Table 2 demonstrates the comparison of a selected group of comparator states and how they rank in a larger national comparison.

Table 2

<b>Physicians Per Capita for Comparator States in 2000</b>			
<b>STATE</b>	<b>Physicians Per Capita</b>	<b>National Rank</b>	
Alaska	166	40	
Idaho	145	49	
<b>Montana</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>24</b>	
New Mexico	168	37	
North Dakota	185	28	
Oregon	196	16	
South Dakota	N/A	N/A	
Washington	196	15	
Wyoming	155	46	

Under the Montana Workers' Compensation Statute, in most instances, the worker is allowed to choose the physician with whom they will treat for their work related injury. It is most likely that workers injured on the job will initially go to whomever the employer sends them immediately following the injury. Or, if the injury is not immediately life

threatening, they will go to their usual family physician if they have one and then may be referred to a specialist thereafter. So knowing the number of and placement of physicians in Montana (especially primary care physicians) should shed some light on the “access to medical care” issue in the workers’ compensation system.

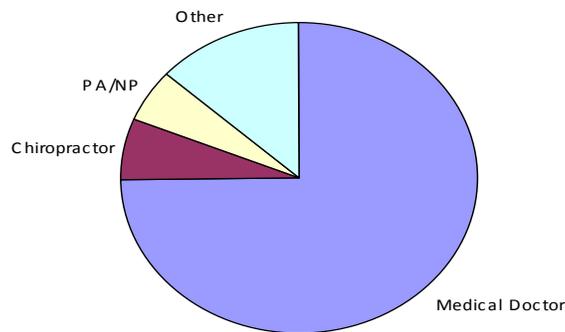
According to a recent survey of injured workers done by the Employment Relations Division of the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, the majority of care received by injured workers is provided by medical doctors. Chiropractors, physician assistants and nurse practitioners may also less often treat injured workers and they may be treated by specialists, physical therapists or other practitioner’s. (See Table 3 and Figure 3)

Table 3

What type of health care professional provided the majority of your medical care?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Medical Doctor	74.8%	410
Chiropractor	6.2%	34
PA/NP	5.7%	31
Other	13.3%	73
<i>answered question</i>		548

Figure 3

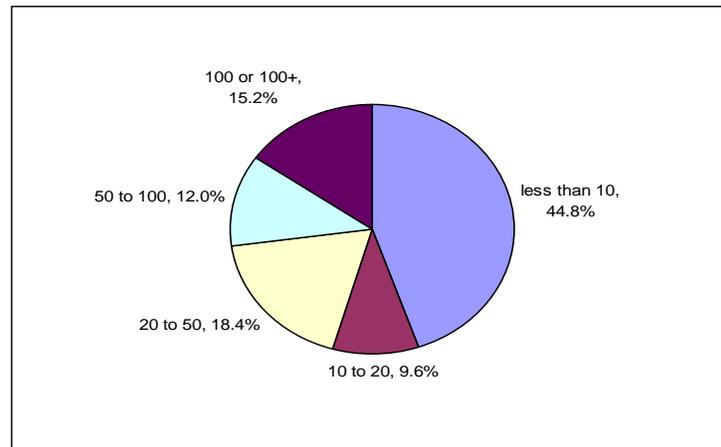
Primary Medical Provider



The second set of information that provides insight into medical care access for injured workers once again comes from questions on a survey done by the Employment Relations Division of the Montana Department of Labor and Industry in June of 2008. One such question asked injured workers was, “How many miles did you have to travel to get to a primary health care professional?” The results (shown in Figure 4) demonstrate that while the majority of injured workers answering this question only had to travel less

than 20 miles (54%), 27% had to travel farther than 50 miles and 15% had to travel 100 miles or more for treatment.

Figure 4 – Miles Traveled To Primary Treating Physician



Since Montana as a whole faces a shortage of physicians, the resulting answer for injured workers access is that in most counties, **injured workers’ probably do not have the access they need for medical treatment, although it is better than most comparator states. This means that policymakers should be careful when enacting additional legal requirements that will reduce the current access to providers for purposes of treatment for work related injuries. As new regulations are enacted that affect physicians, it will be important to weigh the impact on access with the return on investment that regulations to increase quality and/or reduce costs may provide.**

Research Question: ***Can Montana Injured Workers Get The Treatment They Need When They Need It?***

Answer: ***Probably***

We come to this conclusion as a result of answers to two questions on the survey of injured workers done by the Employment Relations Division of the Montana Department of Labor and Industry in June of 2008. These questions were, “How much time passed between your date of injury and your visit to a health care professional?” (See table 4); and, “Taking everything into consideration, how satisfied are you with the health care you received for this injury?” (See table 5)

Table 4

How much time passed between your date of injury and your visit to a health care professional?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
None/Less than one day	39.4%	217
1-5 days	38.7%	213
6-30 days	13.6%	75
31-180 days	4.9%	27
More than 180 days	3.4%	19
<i>answered question</i>		551

Table 4 indicates that the majority of injured workers in Montana responding to this survey (over 78%) visited a health care professional for treatment within 5 days of their injury and over 39% visited a health care provider the same day as the injury. What was not asked in follow up was if the delay was due to their inability to get into see a health care provider rather than to another reason (such as they did not know they were injured or they did not think it was severe enough to seek treatment initially). It is recommended that this follow up question be added to the next survey.

The second survey question was designed to obtain an indication of the over all satisfaction with the health care injured workers received after they were injured. In this question, 75.6% of the workers responding indicated that they were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their health care; 7.2% were neutral and the remaining 17.2% were somewhat or very dissatisfied with their health care.

Table 5

Taking everything into consideration, how satisfied are you with the health care you received for this injury?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Very satisfied	51.0%	270
Somewhat satisfied	24.6%	130
Neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied	7.2%	38
Somewhat dissatisfied	8.5%	45
Very dissatisfied	8.7%	46
<i>answered question</i>		529

To put these results in perspective, we can compare them to the injured worker surveys done by the Workers' Compensation Research Institute for nine other states<sup>6</sup>. Although the survey question was not worded exactly the same, the questions in both surveys were designed to measure how injured workers perceived their medical treatment after injury and therefore is comparable as a general indicator to put Montana's results into some perspective. Montana's surveys presented respondents with five possible choices ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied with the middle option being "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied". WCRI had only four possible answers and did not have the middle "neutral" answer which probably had the effect of forcing respondents into the satisfied or dissatisfied categories. If we eliminate the "neutral response from the Montana survey we get the following results for comparison purposes:

Table 6

Injured Worker's Survey Response to Satisfaction with Overall Care		
State	Percentage "Somewhat" or "Very Satisfied"	Percentage who were "Very Dissatisfied"
California	70	19
Connecticut	84	10
Florida	73	15
Maryland	82	10
Massachusetts	85	8
Michigan	82	9
<b>Montana</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>9</b>
North Carolina	80	16
Pennsylvania	83	9
Tennessee	76	16
Texas	79	13
Wisconsin	87	6

*Notes: Montana results were obtained from a survey done by the Employment Relations Division in 2008. All the remaining data comes from a separate survey done by WCRI entitled *Outcomes for Injured Workers in Michigan* by Sharon Belton and Te-Chin Lui in June of 2009. As such the results are not completely comparable, but are used to demonstrate that Montana does not appear to be an outlier in injured workers satisfaction with medical treatment. WCRI's question was "Now think about all of the medical care that you received, from the first treatment for your injury until now. Were you satisfied or dissatisfied with the medical care you received overall? Than the interviewer probed for very or somewhat. The Montana survey questions was "Taking everything into consideration, how satisfied are you with the health care you received for this injury?" Additionally, both surveys had five responses, four of them were "very satisfied", "somewhat satisfied", "somewhat dissatisfied" and "very dissatisfied". However, the Montana survey offered a fifth response of "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" and the WCRI survey allowed a response of "don't know". Both of those responses have been eliminated from the numerator in the above calculations.*

<sup>6</sup> Belton, Sharon and Te Chin Lui, *Outcomes for Injured Workers in Michigan*, June, 2009, Workers Compensation Research Institute, Cambridge, MA. [www.wcrinet.org](http://www.wcrinet.org)