

Few Young Doctors Are Training To Care For U.S. Elderly



A report in [Kaiser Health News](#) has highlighted the serious lack of physicians available to tend to the growing population of elderly in the U.S. saying the problem is going to get worse in the future.

Dr Todd Goldberg is one of 36 geriatricians in the state of West Virginia which has the third oldest population in America after Main and Florida. Goldberg spoke about the need for geriatricians, nurses, physical therapists and psychologists trained specifically for dealing with the 65-plus age group.

"The current workforce is inadequately trained and inadequately prepared to deal with what's been called the silver tsunami — a tidal wave of elderly people — increasing in the population in West Virginia, across America and across the world really," Goldberg said.

The dearth of appropriate physicians is likely to worsen by 2030 when one in five Americans will be entitled to Medicare, the state health insurance.

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As a teacher at the Charleston division of [West Virginia University](#) and manager of one of the state's four geriatric fellowship programs for medical residents, Goldberg has a bird's-eye view on the situation.

Since 2013, no doctors have joined the fellowship program at WVU-Charleston. These problems are wider. The same figures are repeated for West Virginia as a whole which Goldberg says is reflective of a national problem.

The United States has 130 geriatric fellowship programs, with 383 positions. In 2016, only 192 of them were filled.

The stumbling block appears to be the level of debt the average medical student graduates with: \$183,000. Dr Shirley Neitch runs the geriatrics department at Marshall University Medical School in Huntington, West Virginia. She says it isn't a lack of interest in geriatrics but a fear of rising debt. "They think that they need to get into something without the fellowship year where they can start getting paid for their work."

Source: [Kaiser Health News](#)

Image Credit: Kara Lofton/West Virginia Public Broadcasting

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