

Measuring Demand and Supply for Physician Assistants in New York

Shen Wang, MPH, MPA, Robert Martiniano, DrPH, MPA
Center for Health Workforce Studies, School of Public Health, University at Albany

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study was to understand how the demand for physician assistants (PAs) compares to the current supply of PAs actively working in New York State (NYS), as well as their practice characteristics and geographic distribution.

Methods: This study is a comparative analysis of the demand and supply data for PAs in NYS. Demand data were from PA online job postings in 2014, obtained through Burning Glass Technologies (BGT). Data acquisition was funded by a grant award from the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA), Washington, D.C. Supply data were obtained from the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) as of December 31, 2015. About 50% of BGT data were randomly selected and coded into categorized variables. NCCPA identified 10,831 PAs actively working in NYS. BGT and NCCPA data were compared by specialty, setting, employment, degree and experience, and urban/rural status.

Findings: Rural areas were more flexible in their hiring practices. BGT data indicated urban areas offered more full-time positions (79%) than rural areas (73%). About 83% of BGT jobs required at least a master's degree, while only 48% of the active PAs held a master's degree or higher. The demand for PAs in physician practices was 19%, substantially lower than the 33% currently employed in this setting. Fifty-five percent of the current PA workforce worked in hospitals compared to 61% of BGT postings. There was a higher demand for and supply of PAs working in primary care specialties in rural areas than in urban areas. The need for general surgery PAs and for surgical subspecialty PAs statewide was also higher than their corresponding presence in the current workforce.

Conclusions: The data suggests that the distribution of PA job postings is overall comparable to the current workforce, with some variations based on education, practice settings, and surgical specialties.

CONTACT

Center for Health Workforce Studies

518-402-0250
info@chwsny.org
www.chwsny.org

INTRODUCTION

- Employment in the health care field is growing, particularly to address the increasing need for primary care, and physician assistants (PAs) are well-positioned to help meet this rising demand.
- The number of physician assistant jobs in NYS increased by nearly 1,200 or by 29% since 2010.
- The purpose of this study was to measure how the demand for PAs compares to the current supply of PAs actively working in New York State (NYS), and to better understand the practice characteristics and geographic distribution of PAs.

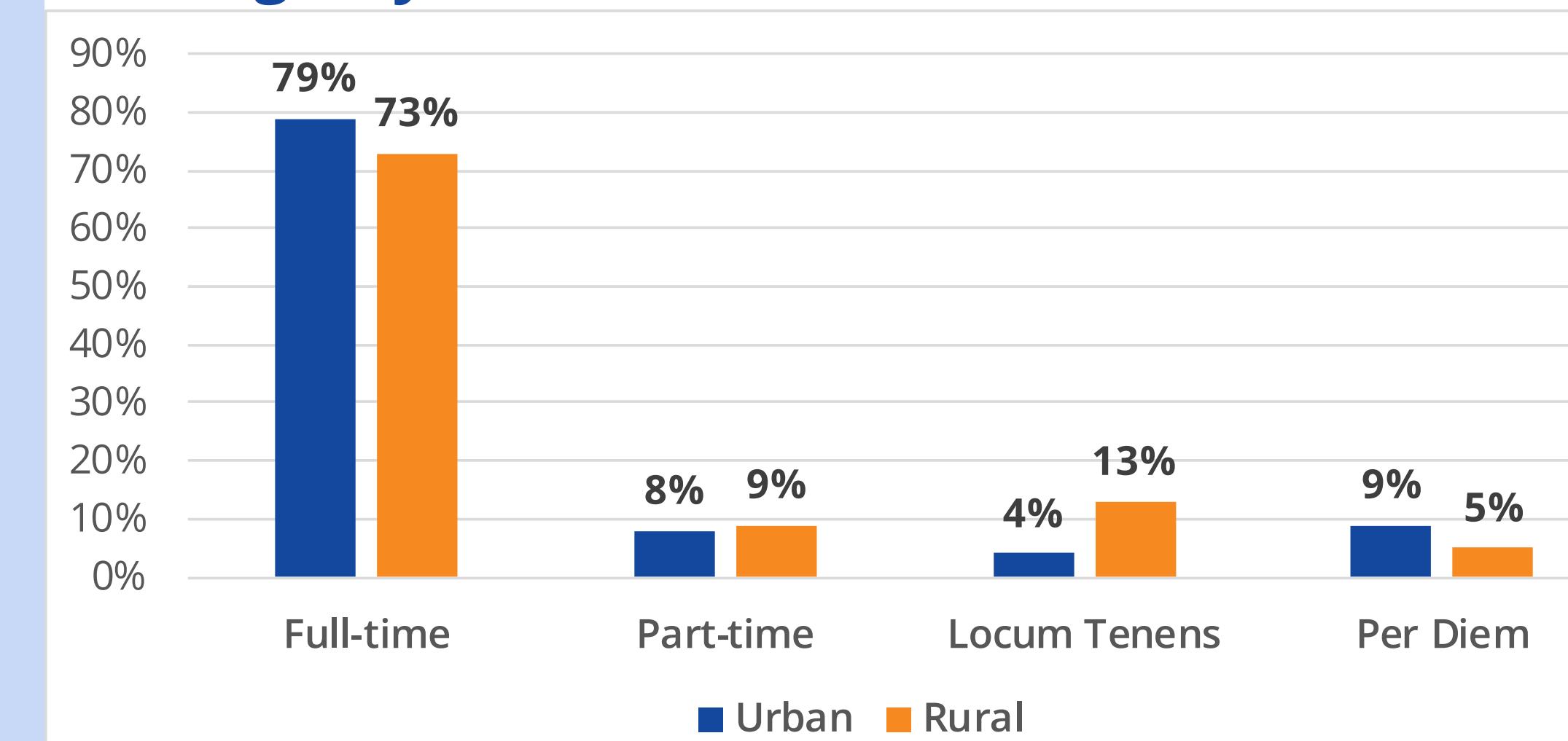
METHODS

- The findings are based on a comparative analysis of the demand and supply data for PAs in NYS between 2014 and 2015.
- The demand data for PAs were based on 2014 online job postings for NYS, which were obtained through BGT, a job market analytics firm who aggregated PA job postings from over 15,000 internet job boards nationwide annually. Data acquisition was funded by a grant award from the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA), Washington, D.C. (Funding of this project does not necessarily constitute an endorsement of the findings of this research report by the PAEA.)
- In total, 50% or 1,317 of the 2,634 job postings supplied by BGT were randomly selected. Typical job postings include information on employer, location, salary, duties, and other job descriptions.
- Job posting were coded for the following variables: job type, specialty of PA, specialty of practice, site, city, zip code, setting, full-time/part-time, degree, certification, new graduates acceptance, and experience requirements.
- The authors and other researchers each pre-coded 50 sample records in order to establish inter-coder reliability -- a process to identify similarity and differences in coding to ensure consistency.
- Supply data were obtained from the NCCPA as of December 31, 2015. NCCPA identified 10,831 PAs actively working in NYS.
- For both demand (BGT) and supply (NCCPA) data, job location was linked to individual New York county, and then categorized as urban or rural.

RESULTS

- BGT data indicated that job postings in urban areas offered more full-time positions (79%) than rural areas (73%), while rural areas hire 3 times more locum tenens than urban areas.

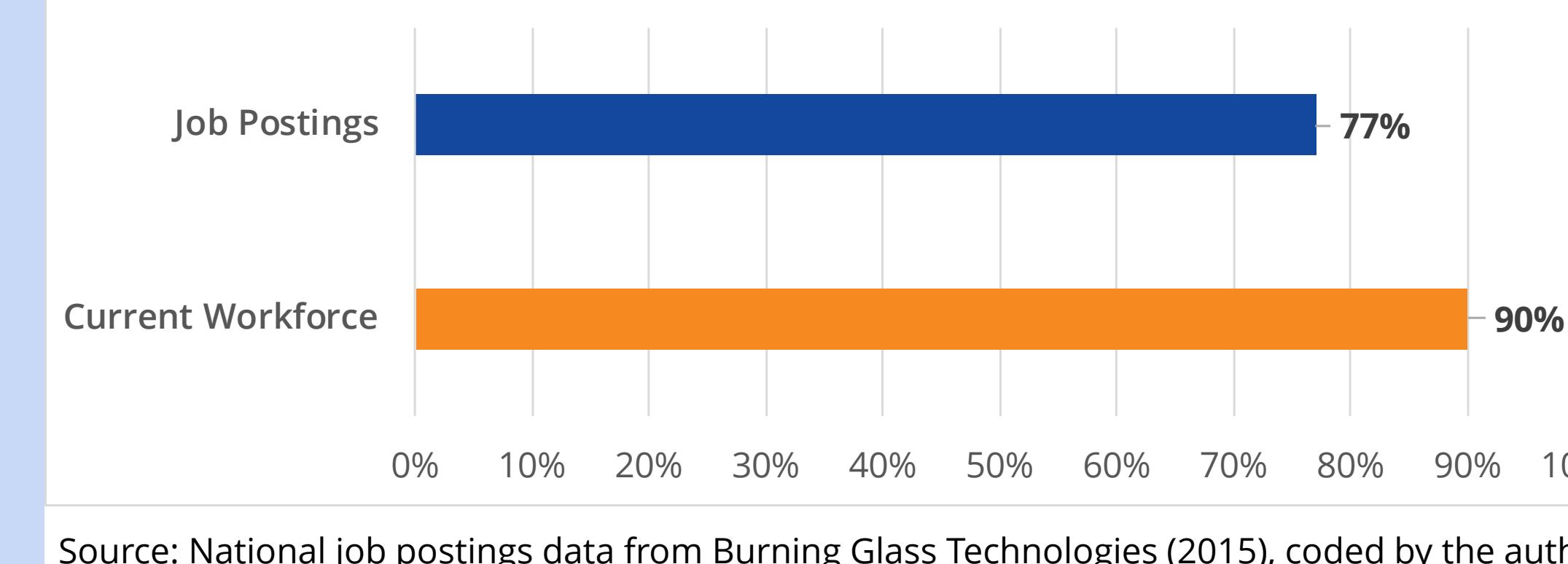
Figure 1. Percentage of Working Status for PA Job Postings, by Rural/Urban, 2014, N=1317



Source: National job postings data from Burning Glass Technologies (2015), coded by the authors.

- About 90% of the current PA workforce worked full-time, compared to 77% of BGT postings.

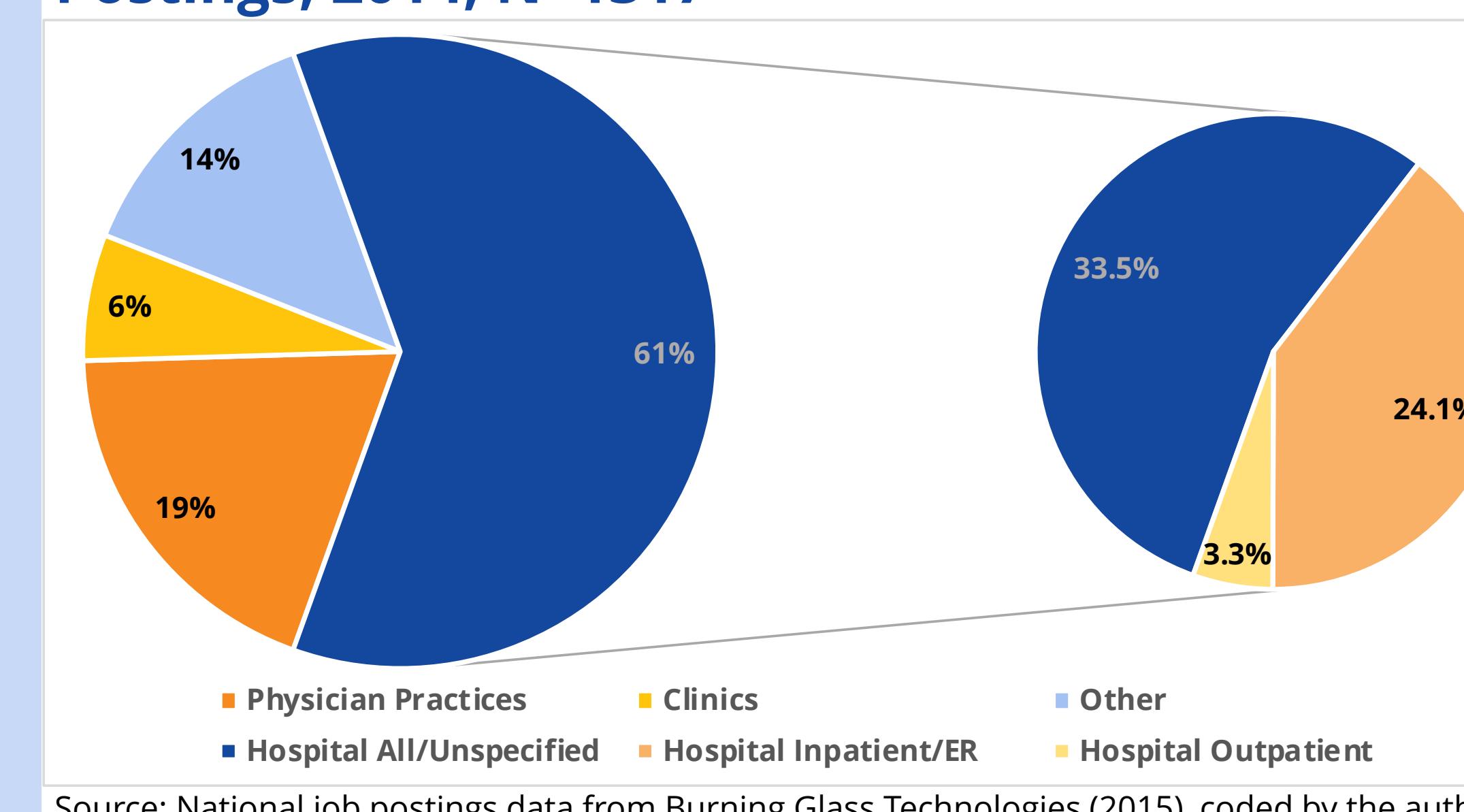
Figure 2. Percentage of Full-time PAs, by Demand/Supply, 2014-2015



Source: National job postings data from Burning Glass Technologies (2015), coded by the authors.

- About 83% of BGT jobs required at least a master's degree, while only 48% of the current workforce held a master's degree or higher.
- Of those job postings that specified practice setting, 19% of the PA demand was in physician practices, lower than the 33% of PA workforce in this setting. This may be attributed to a large number of postings in unspecified hospital settings that may include physician offices or other ambulatory care sites.

Figure 3. Percentage of Practice Settings for PA Job Postings, 2014, N=1317

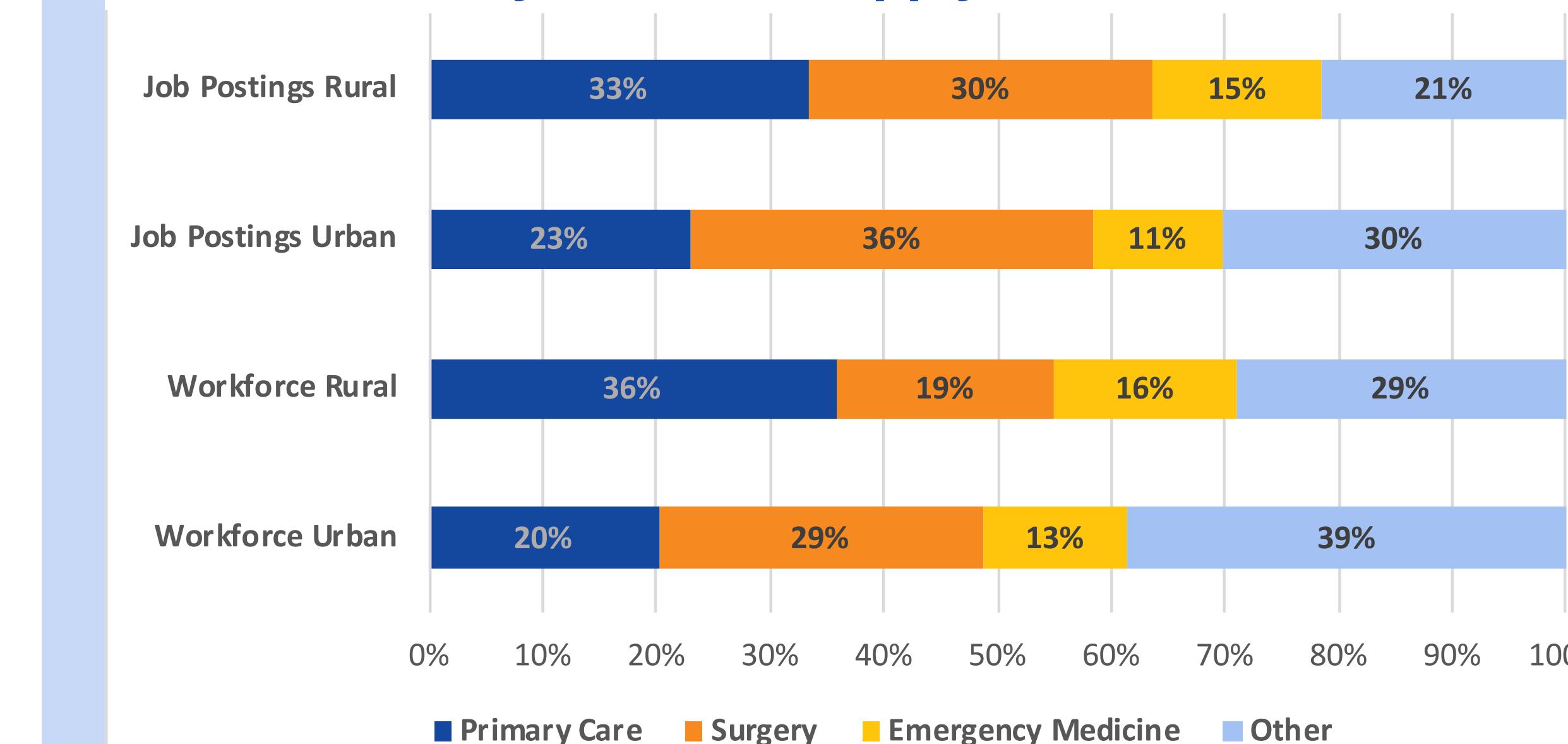


Source: National job postings data from Burning Glass Technologies (2015), coded by the authors.

RESULTS (cont.)

- There was a higher demand for and supply of PAs working in primary care specialties (33% and 36%, respectively) in rural areas than in urban areas (23% and 20%, respectively).

Figure 4. Percentages of Practice Specialty for PAs, by Rural/Urban, by Demand/Supply, 2014-2015



Source: National job postings data from Burning Glass Technologies (2015), coded by the authors.

- The need for general surgery PAs and for surgical subspecialty PAs was also higher than their corresponding presence in the current workforce.

LIMITATIONS

- One-third of the job postings for hospital did not specify inpatient/ER or outpatient settings.
- Time periods for 2 datasets were not the same.

CONCLUSIONS & POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions: The analysis suggests that the distribution of PA job postings is overall comparable to the current workforce, with some variations based on working status, practice settings, and practice specialties. Compared to urban areas, rural areas have more difficulty hiring primary care practitioners, and thus are more flexible in terms of their hiring practices regarding full-time status, specialty, degree, certification, and experience.

Implications: Job posting data can be used to understand changing trends in the demand for PAs.

REFERENCE

- Martiniano R, Boyd L, Rosario R, Gao J, Liu Y, Harun N, Wang S, Moore J. *The Health Care Workforce in New York, 2015-2016: Trends in the Supply and Demand for Health Workers*. Rensselaer, NY: Center for Health Workforce Studies, School of Public Health, SUNY Albany; February 2017.