



Arkansas Minority Health Commission

Your Health. Our Priority.

2018 Arkansas Health Workforce Report

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Executive Summary

Key outcomes from this fourth annual report of diversity in the Arkansas health care workforce include:

- The majority of workers in health occupations are male including physicians, dentists, optometrists, chiropractors and podiatrists. Dental hygienists (99 percent female), specialty surgeons (95 percent male), and general nurses (90 percent female) were occupations with less than 10 percent in a gender field. Pharmacists, specialty nurses and physical therapists enjoyed the most equity in terms of gender.
- Each profession was predominately white. In fact, there were only six professions (i.e., general physicians, specialty physicians, general nurses, pharmacists, podiatrists and social workers) in which the proportion of white workers was less than 90 percent. Optometrists were 97 percent white, making them the least diverse profession with respect to race, whereas social workers were 76 percent white and 21 percent African American, making them the most diverse group in 2017. Race was not available for dental assistants, dietitians or speech therapists at the time of reporting.
- Geographic distribution followed a similar pattern for most professions. The highest concentration of workers tended to be in the central, northwest and northeast regions of the state (i.e., the more urban areas of the state). Some professions were absent in a large number of counties. Specialty surgeons, for example, lacked active professionals in 48 counties, and general surgeons lack professionals from 38 counties. Other professions enjoyed much greater dispersion. For example, dental assistants and nurses appeared to be active in all 75 counties. Professions including general physicians and pharmacists were active in all except one county.
- Despite the legislative mandate requiring licensing boards to capture and report data on demographic characteristics of those licensed in Arkansas, data were not consistently provided. Three of the seventeen healthcare professions covered in this report failed to report some or all of the required demographic data, compared to 4/17 in 2016 and 7/17 in 2015.

Introduction

Monitoring the healthcare workforce is necessary to ensure it is large enough and skilled enough to deliver the vital public health services to the population. Observation provides data regarding the impact of investment; advocating for additional resources; evaluating gaps in workforce development; and developing recruitment and retention methods.¹ An adequate supply and distribution of well-prepared health workers is imperative to guarantee health care needs of the population. In accordance with the population of Arkansas, a diverse workforce is extremely important to ensure accessible, affordable and quality health care.² Diversity in healthcare allows for increased cultural competence,³ and increasing trust and communication between professionals and patients. In addition, because healthcare careers generally provide greater economic benefits in relation to other career paths, greater representation in the field leads to benefits for a wider range of individuals, families and communities.

In order to understand more clearly where Arkansas stands with regard to diversity in the healthcare workforce, examination of current data is necessary. This examination is made possible by Arkansas Act 1489 of 2009,⁴ which requires state agencies, boards and commissions that license health professionals in the state to provide demographic data on licensees yearly. This report was developed utilizing this information, and incorporates the most recent data provided for selected health professionals in Arkansas, with a focus on race, age, gender and geographic distribution.

All data were obtained from Arkansas' professional licensing boards through the Arkansas Minority Health Commission.

Dentists

Source: Arkansas Board of Dental Examiners

In 2017, there were 1,494 dentists licensed in Arkansas.

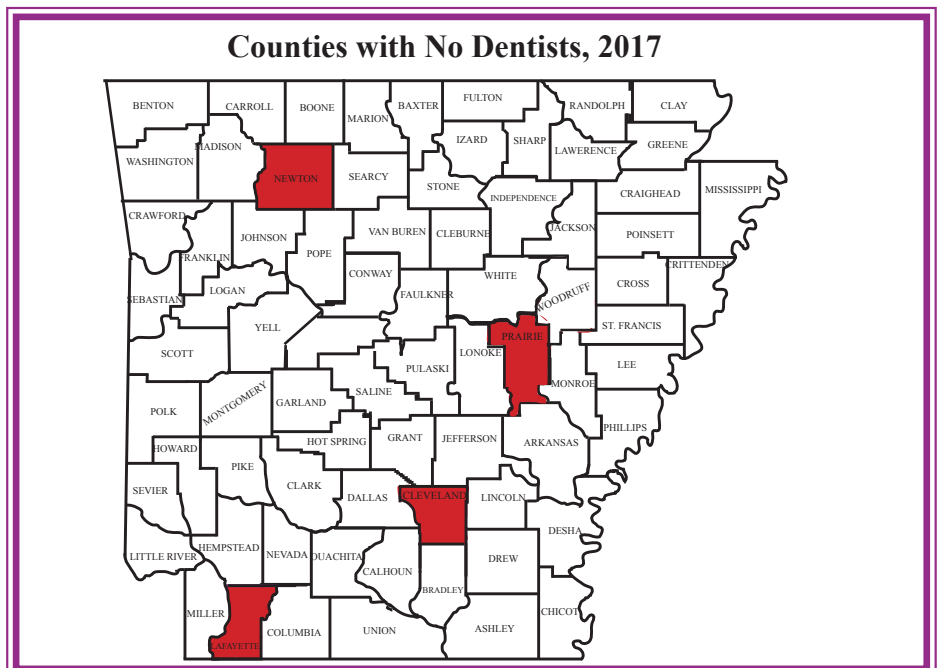
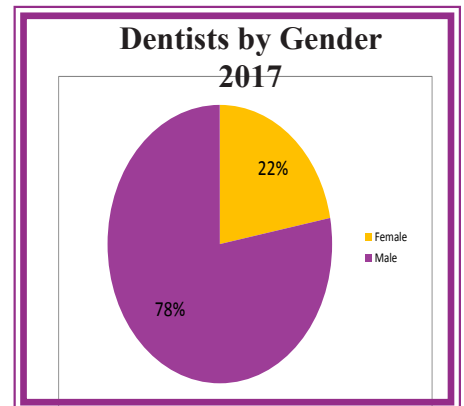
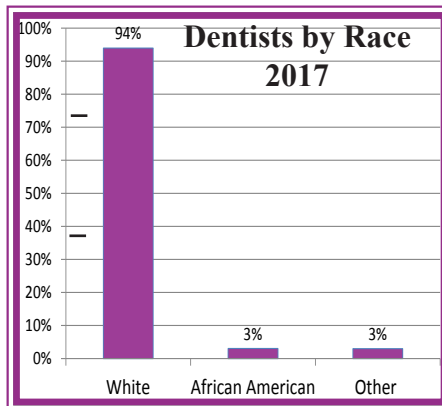
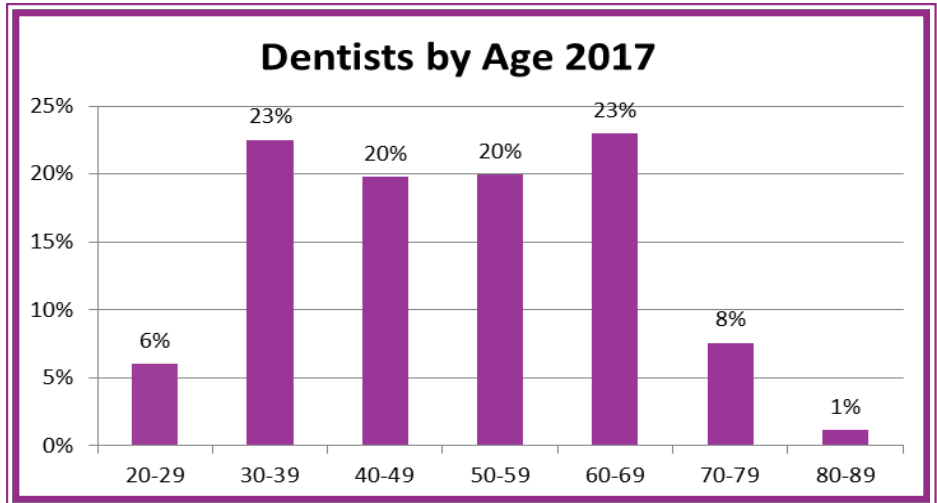
In 2017, dentists tended to be middle aged, with a majority (63 percent) reporting ages between 40 and 69.

In addition, the majority of dentists were white with only 6 percent being other races or ethnicities.

Dentists were also more likely to be male than female.

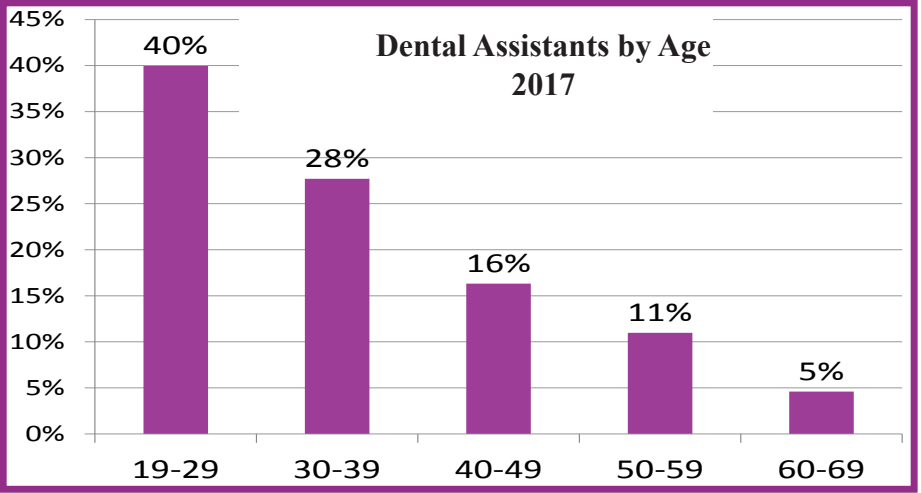
A review of the geographic distribution of dentists indicated that four counties (highlighted on the map) had no dentist with an address in that county.

*Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.



Dental Assistants

Source: Arkansas Board of Dental Examiners



In 2017, there were 3,916 dental assistants practicing in Arkansas.

In general, dental assistants tended to be young – 84 percent were under the age of 50.

No race or gender data was provided for dental assistants.

A review of the geographic distribution of dental assistants indicated that every county in the state had at least one dental assistant. No counties are shaded red in the map to the right, indicating coverage in each county.



Dental Hygienists

Source: Arkansas Board of Dental Examiners

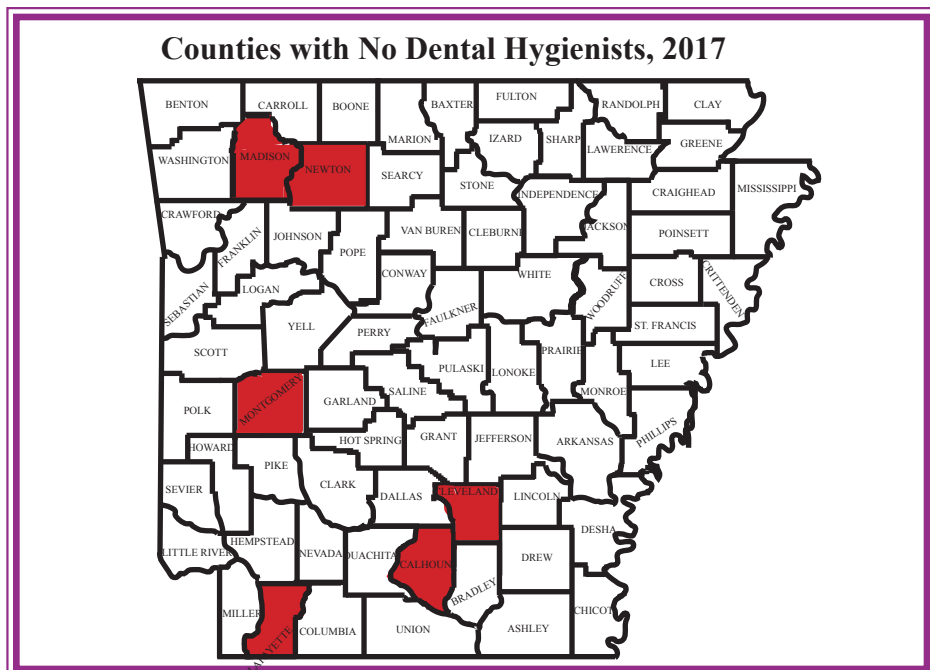
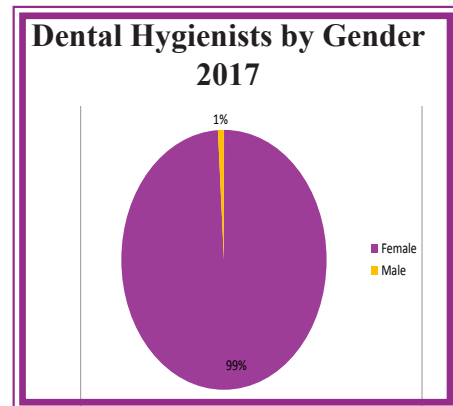
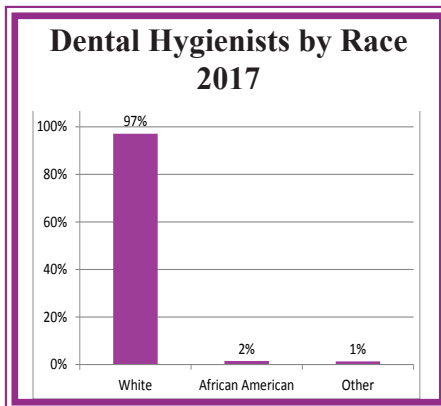
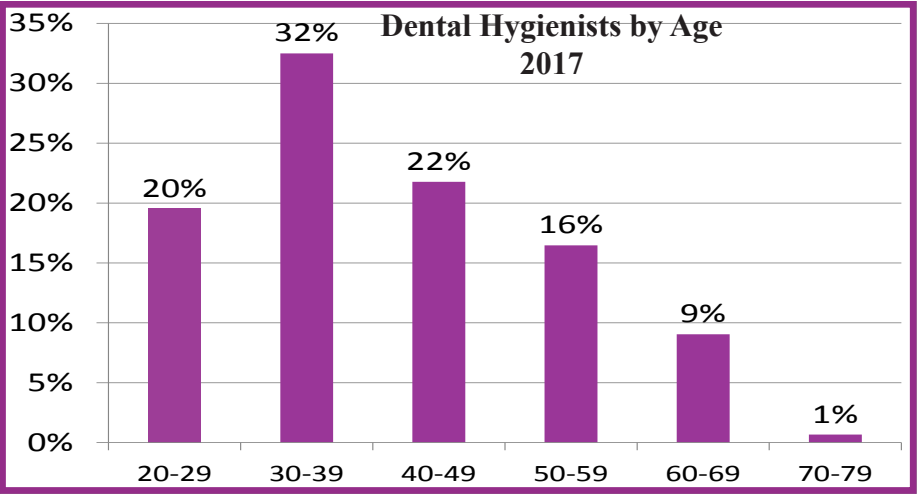
In 2017, there were 1,792 dental hygienists practicing in Arkansas.

Dental hygienists tended to be young, with 74 percent being under the age of 50.

Dental hygienists were also primarily white, with African Americans and other racial minorities making up 3 percent of the profession.

A review of the geographic distribution of dental assistants indicated that there were six counties in the state with no dental hygienist reporting a work or mailing address with that county.

*Note: Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.



General Physicians

Source: Arkansas Medical Board

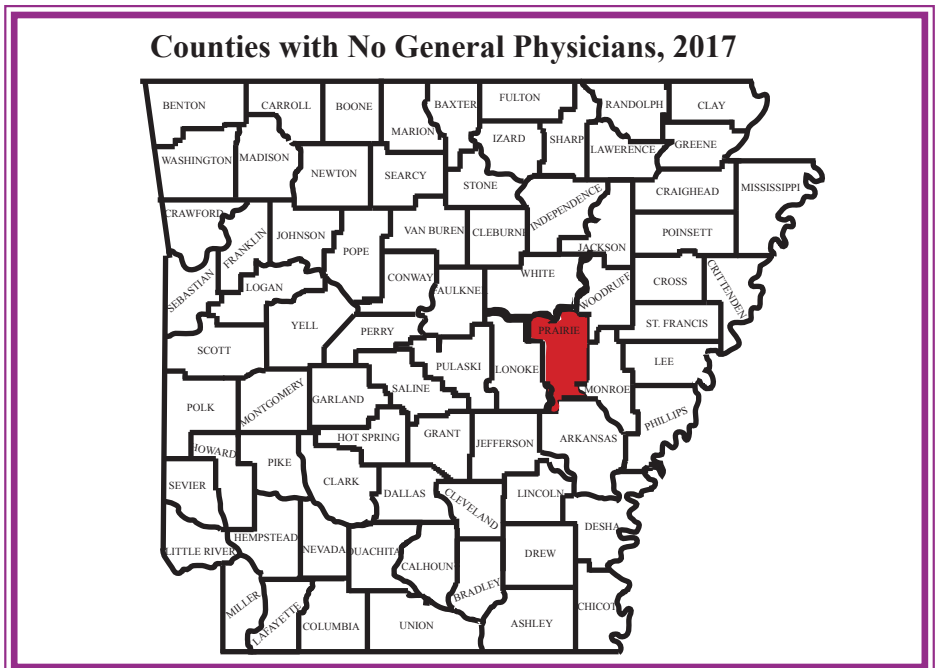
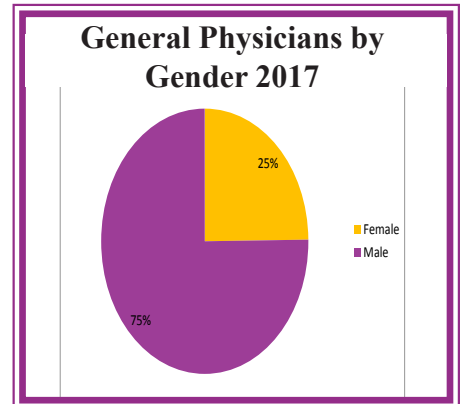
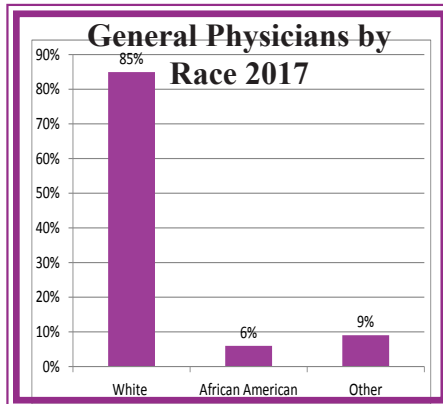
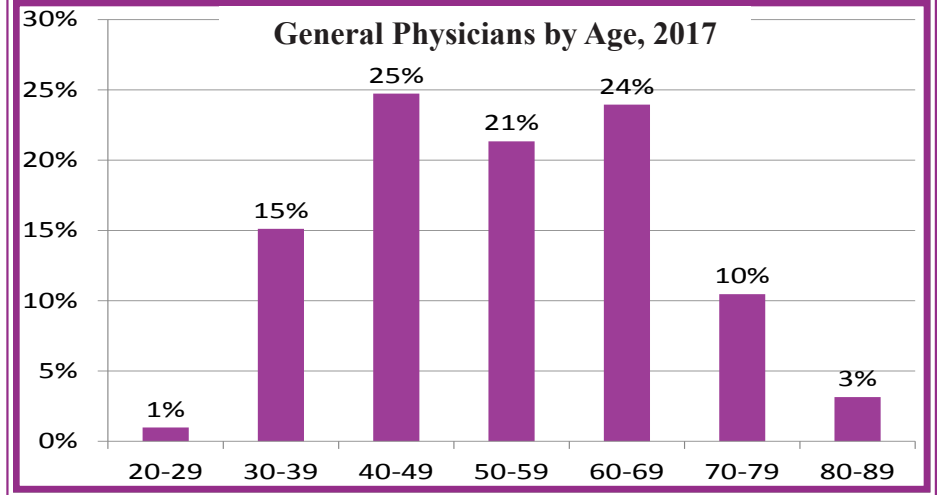
In 2017, there were 1,528 general physicians active in Arkansas.

Practically all general physicians were over the age of 30; the majority (70 percent) of physicians were between the ages of 40 and 70.

General physicians were about 85 percent white.

A majority of general physicians were male, only 25 percent of Arkansas general physicians were female.

A review of the geographic distribution of general physicians indicated that only one county in the state had no general physicians providing either a work or home address within that county (Prairie).



Specialty Physicians

Source: Arkansas Medical Board

In 2017, there were 4,089 specialty physicians active in Arkansas.

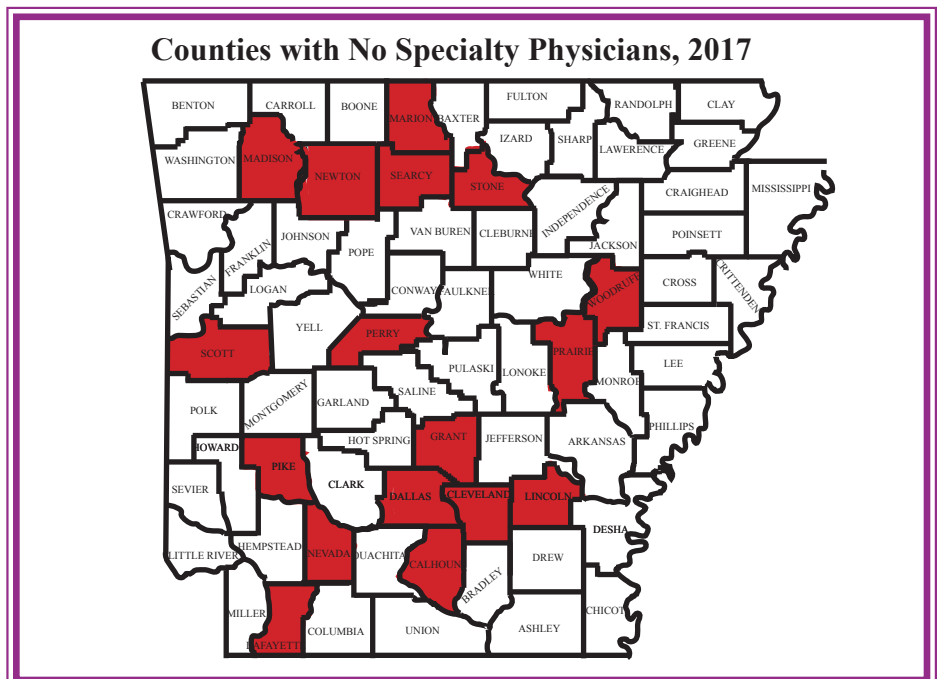
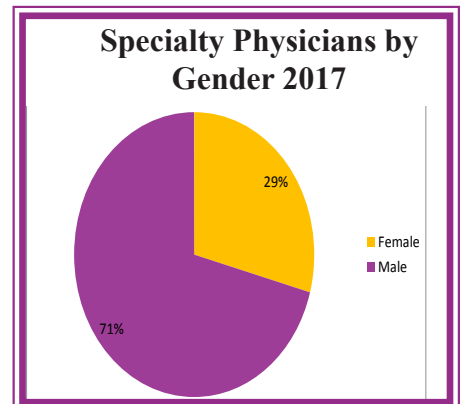
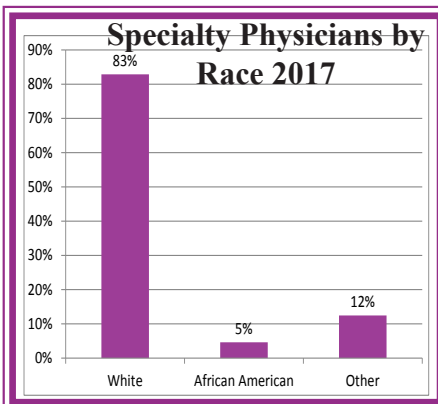
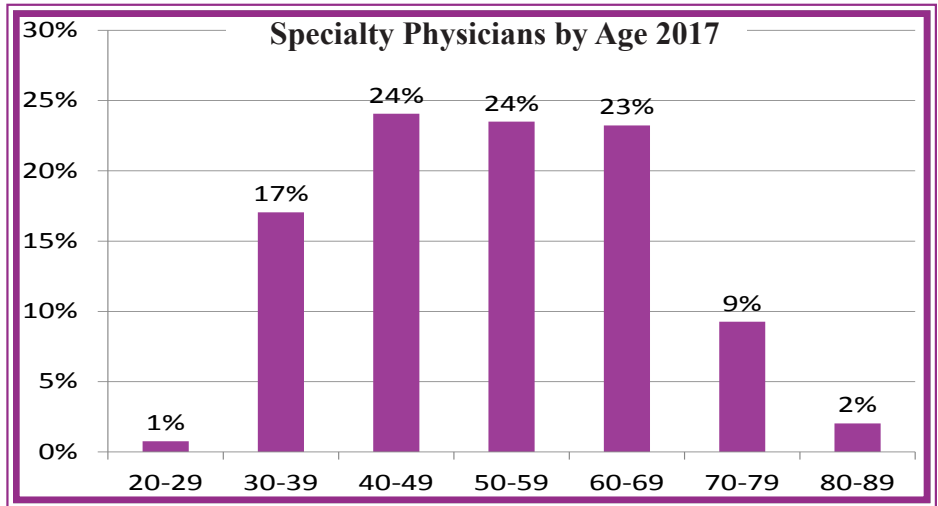
Few specialty physicians were under the age of 30 (1 percent), presumably because of the additional training needed for specialty practice. The majority (71 percent) were between the ages of 40 and 69.

Specialty physicians were predominately white, but about 17 percent identified with other races.

A majority of specialty physicians were male, only about 29 percent of Arkansas specialty physicians were female.

A review of the geographic distribution of specialty physicians indicated that 17 counties in the state had no specialty physician providing either a work or home address within that county (indicated in red on the map to the right).

*Note percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.



General Surgeons

Source: Arkansas Medical Board

In 2017, there were 250 general surgeons active in Arkansas.

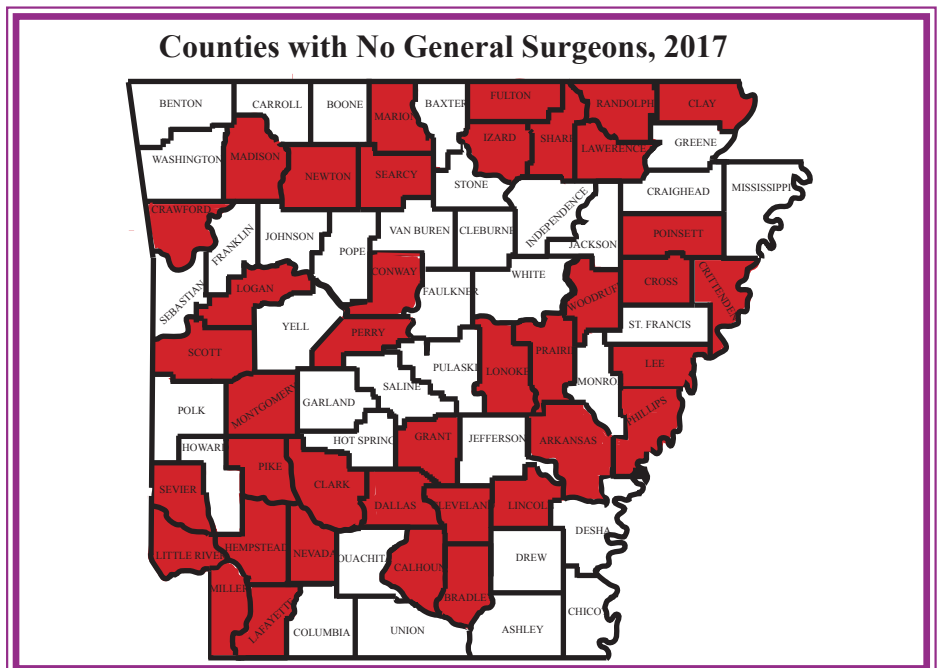
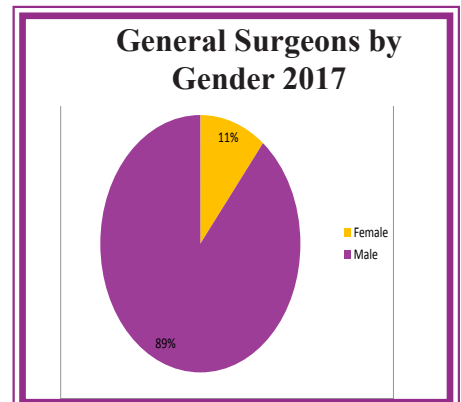
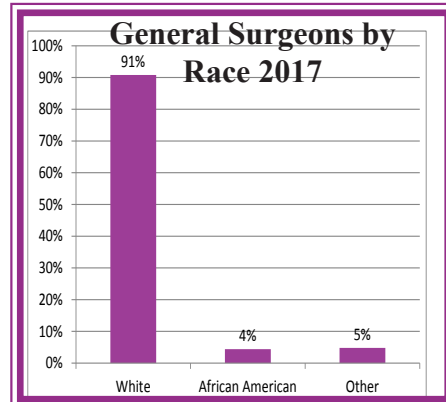
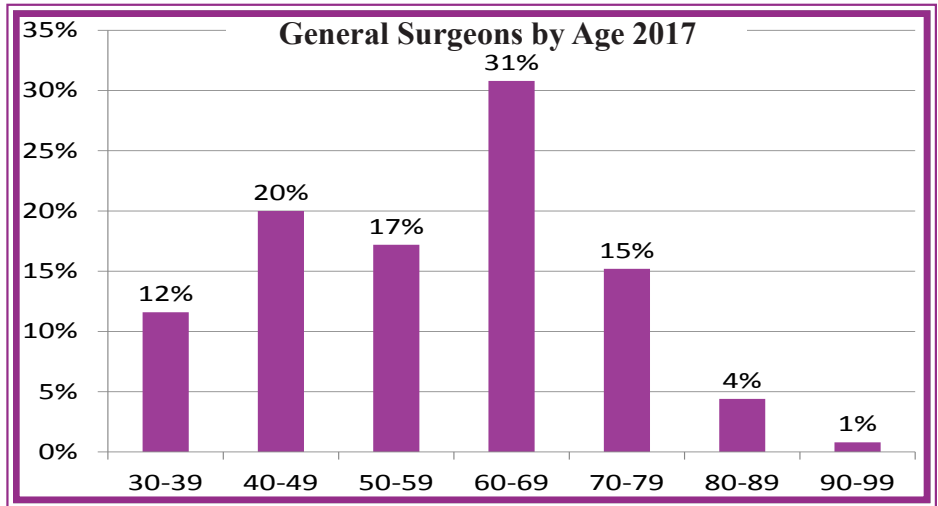
The majority (88 percent) of general surgeons were over the age of 40.

General surgeons were predominately white, but about 9 percent identified with other races.

A majority of general surgeons were male, only about 11 percent of Arkansas general surgeons were female.

A review of the geographic distribution of general surgeons indicated that 39 counties in the state had no general surgeon providing either a work or home address within that county (indicated in red on the map to the right).

*Note percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.



Specialty Surgeons

Source: Arkansas Medical Board

In 2017, there were 373 specialty surgeons in Arkansas.

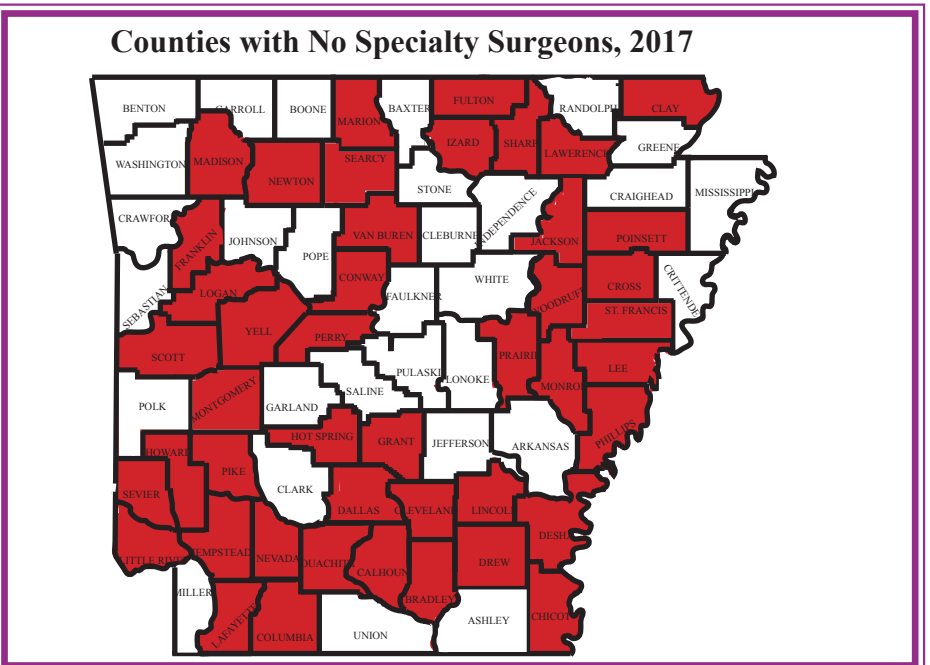
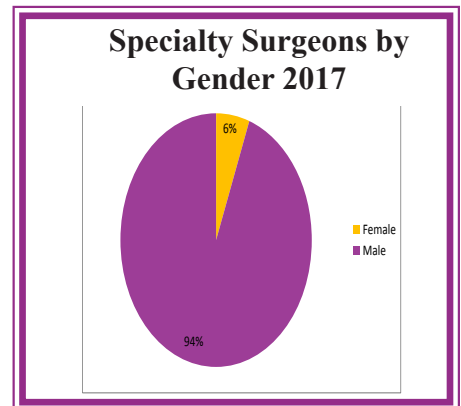
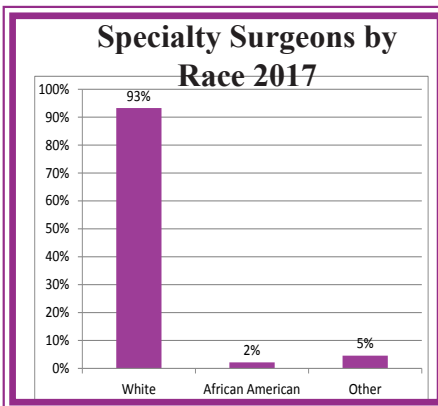
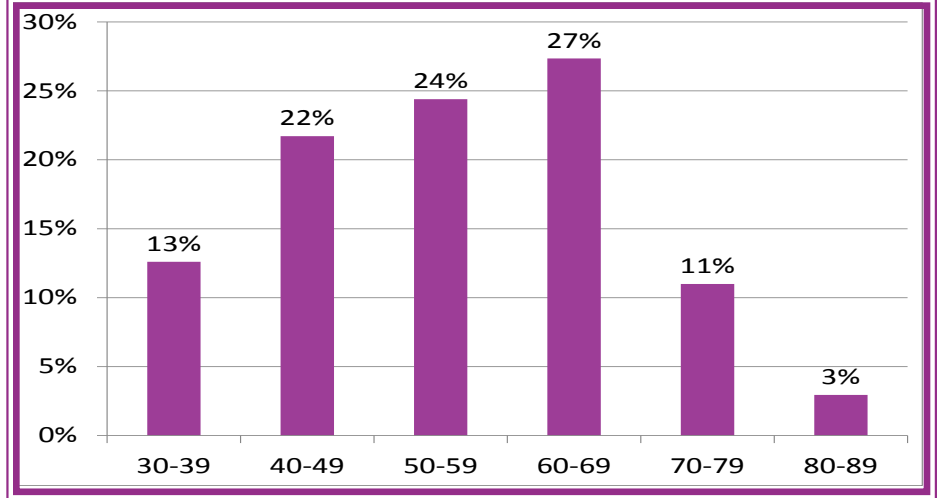
No surgeons were under the age of 30, presumably because of the years of additional training required. The majority (73 percent) were between the ages of 40 and 69.

Specialty surgeons were overwhelmingly white, with only 7 percent identifying as other races.

Additionally, specialty surgeons were predominately male at 94 percent.

A review of the geographic distribution of surgeons indicated that the majority practice in metropolitan areas of the state. A total of 45 counties (indicated in red on the map to the right) have no specialty surgeon with an address listed in that county.

*Note: Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.



General Nurses

Source: Arkansas Nursing Board

In 2017, there were 57,892 active nurses in Arkansas.

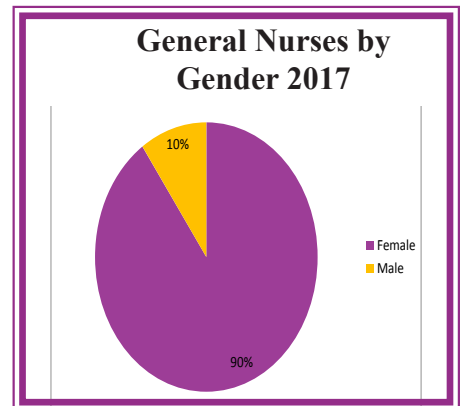
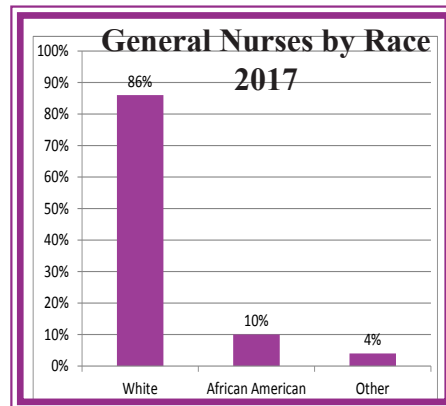
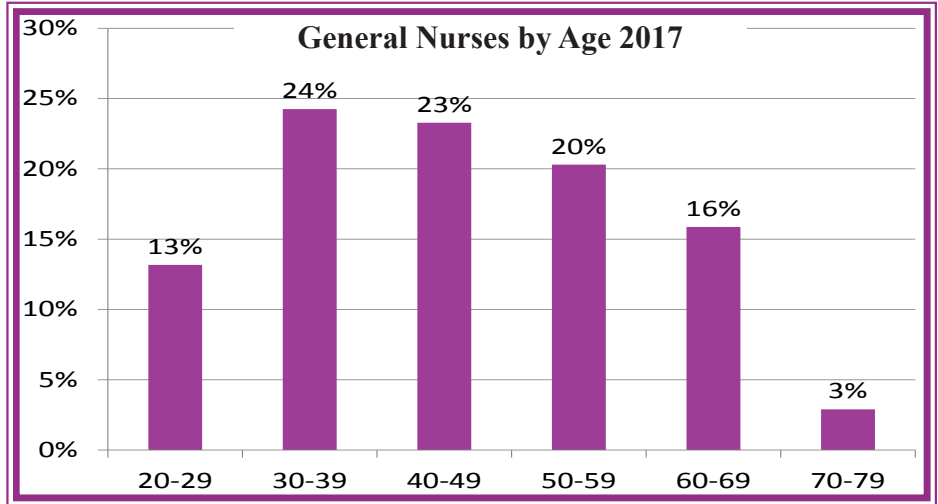
Generally, nurses tended to be younger, with 60 percent being under the age of 50.

Nurses tended to be white, but 10 percent were African American, a proportion higher than that found in many other health professions in the state.

Nurses tended to be female, making up 90 percent of the active nurses in the state.

A review of the geographic distribution of nurses indicated that there are no counties without at least one nurse having an address in that county.

*Note: These data may include duplicate licenses as nurses may hold multiple licenses in different specialties. Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.



Nurses - Selected Nursing Specialties

Source: Arkansas Nursing Board

In 2017, there were 6,634 active specialty nurses (including certified nursing midwives and registered nurse anesthetologists) in Arkansas.

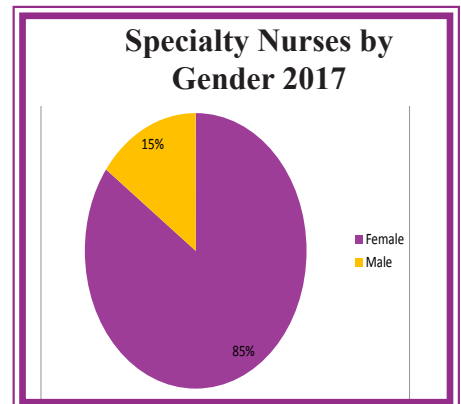
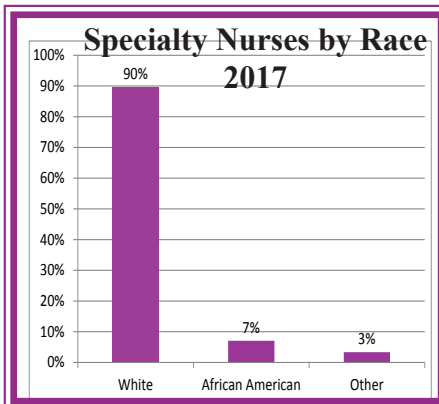
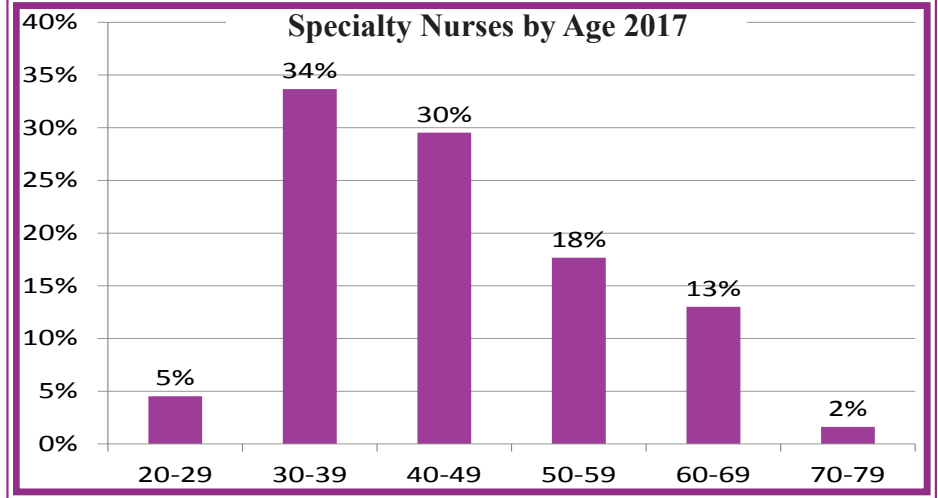
Specialized nurses tended to be a little older, with nearly half (48 percent) between the ages of 40 and 59 and another 13 percent between 60 and 69 years.

Specialty nurses were generally white, with about 10 percent making up other races.

Specialty nurses tended to be female, making up 85 percent of the active nurses in the state.

A review of the geographic distribution of specialty nurses indicated that there were two counties in the state (indicated in red on the map) with no specialty nurse listing an address for that county, Franklin and Van Buren counties.

*Note: These data may include duplicate licenses as nurses may hold multiple licenses in different specialties. Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.



Optometrists

Source: Arkansas Optometry Licensing Board

In 2017, there were 530 active optometrists in the state.

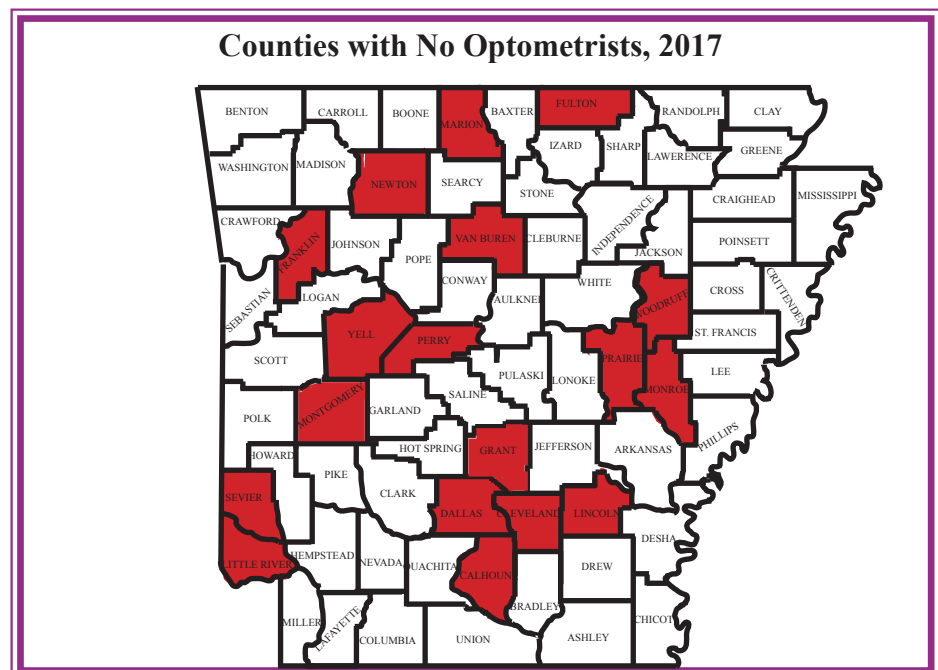
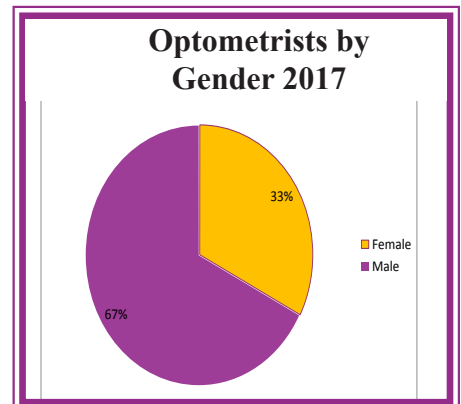
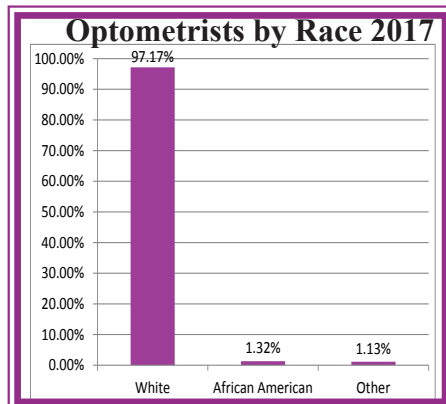
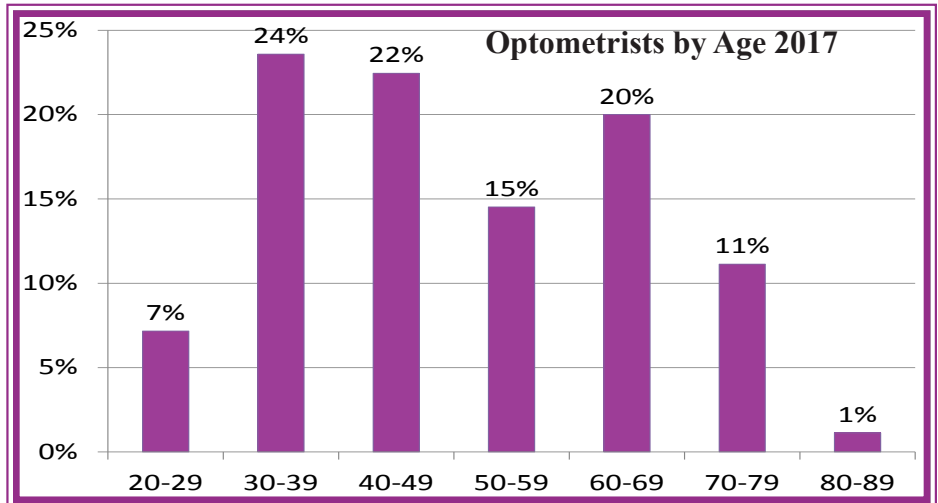
Optometrists tended to be younger, with 53 percent being below the age of 50.

In addition, optometrists were generally white, with other races and ethnicities making up less than 3 percent of the profession.

Optometrists were also more likely to be male, with only one third of active optometrists being female.

As with other health related professions, optometrists tended to be located in the more urban areas of the state. There were 18 counties (indicated in red on the map) with no optometrists listing an address in that county.

*Note: Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.



Pharmacists

Source: Arkansas Board of Pharmacy

In 2017, there were 6,255 active pharmacists in the state.

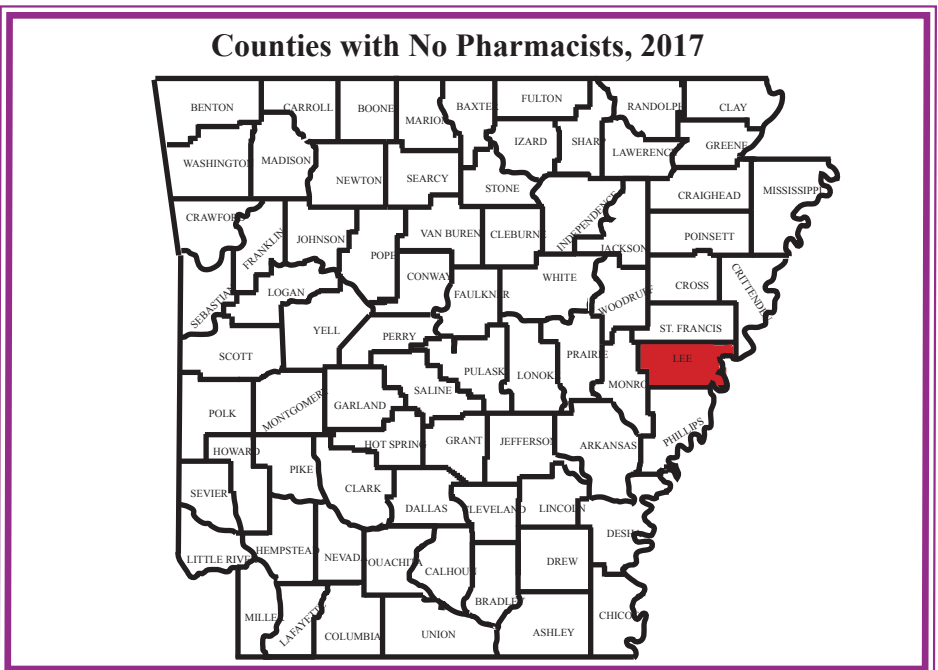
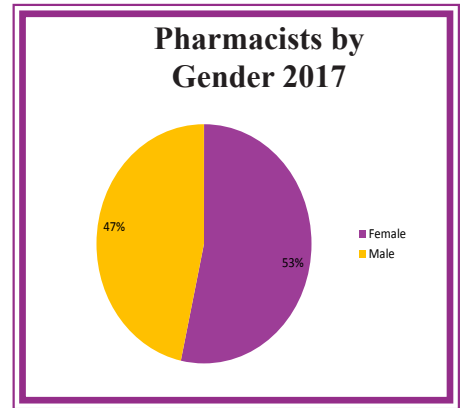
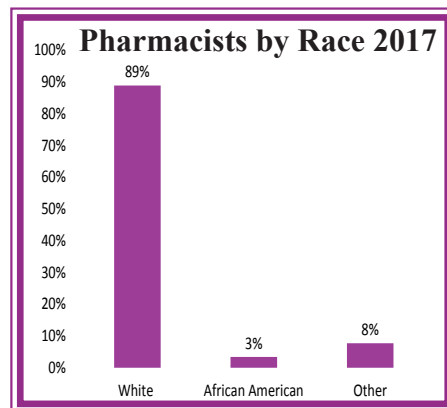
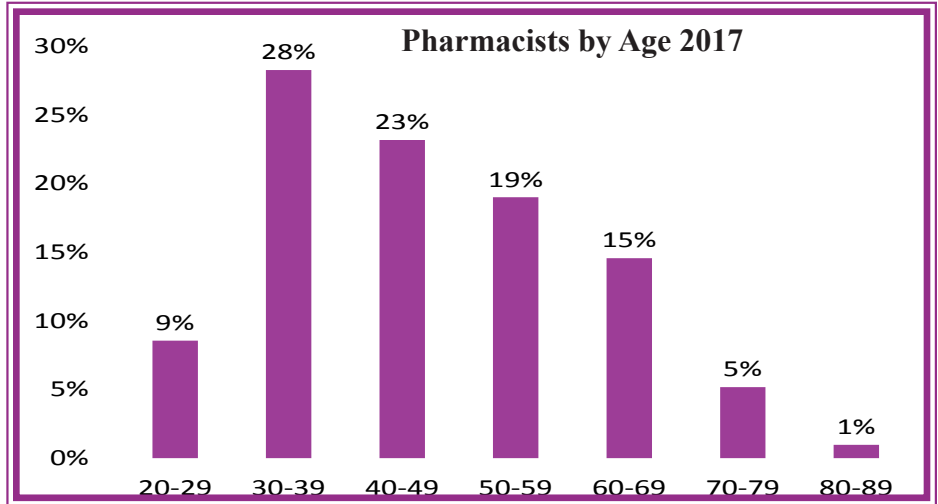
Pharmacists tended to be younger, with 50 percent reporting ages under 50 years.

Almost 9 out of every 10 pharmacists in the state were white.

Pharmacists were fairly evenly divided between males and females.

A review of the geographic distribution of pharmacists in the state indicated that only one county in the state had no pharmacists providing either a work or home address within that county (Lee).

*Note: Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.



Podiatrists

Source: Arkansas State Board of Podiatry Examiners

In 2017, there were 119 active podiatrists in Arkansas.

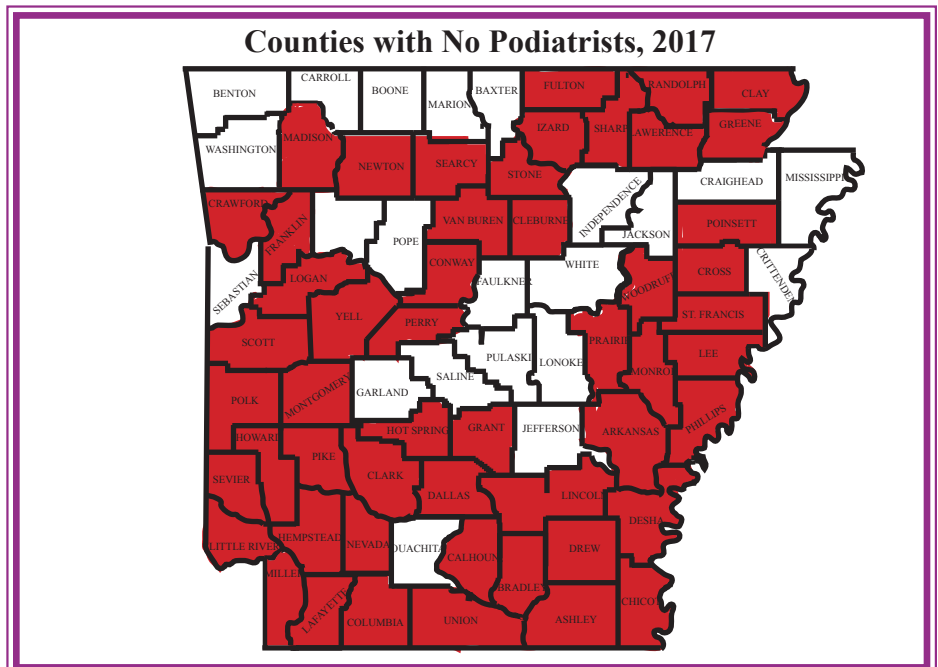
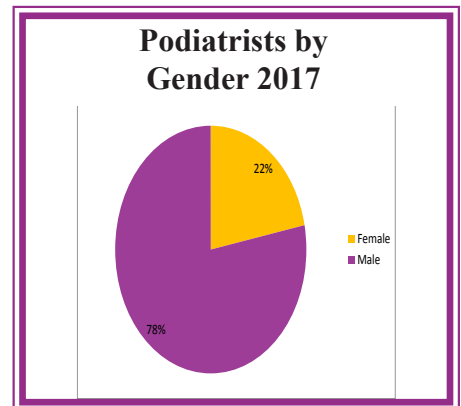
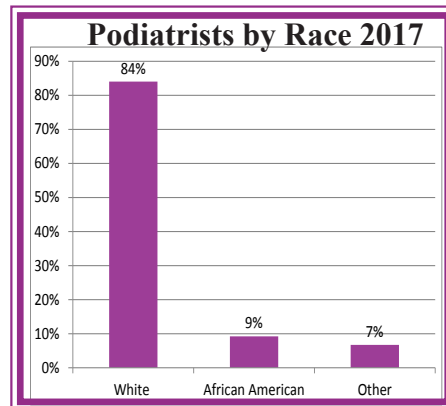
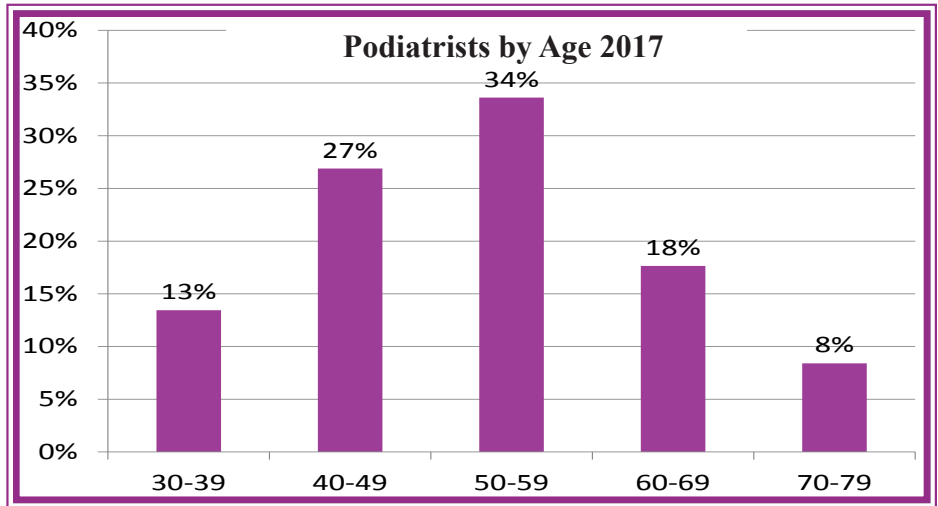
Podiatrists tended to be middle-aged with 79 percent falling between the ages of 40 and 69.

Although 84 percent of podiatrists are white, about 16 percent make up other races.

Podiatrists tended to be male, with nearly 80 percent of active podiatrists being men.

A review of the geographic distribution of pharmacists in the state indicated there were 53 counties (indicated in red on the map to the right) that do not have podiatrists listing an address in that county.

*Note: Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.



Chiropractors

Source: Arkansas Board of Chiropractic Examiners

In 2017, there were 881 active chiropractors in Arkansas.

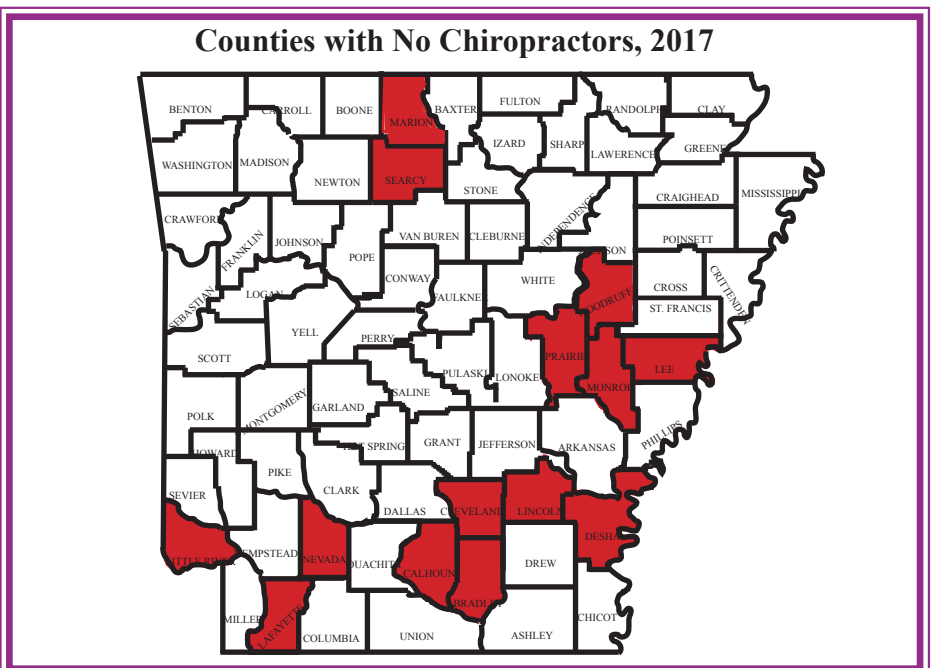
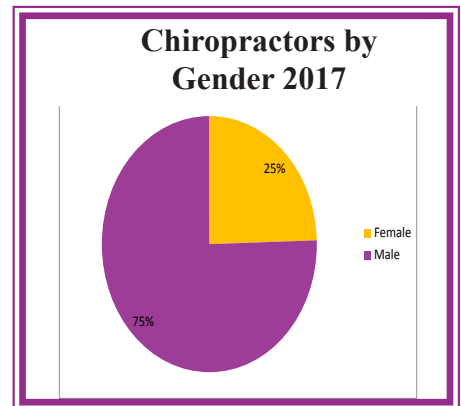
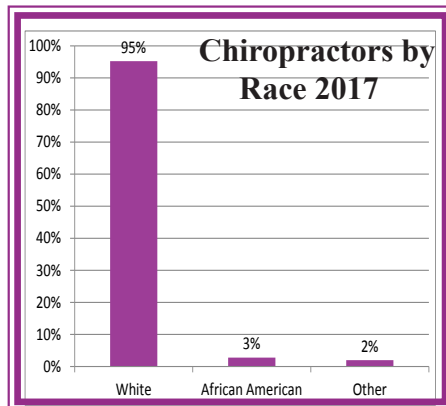
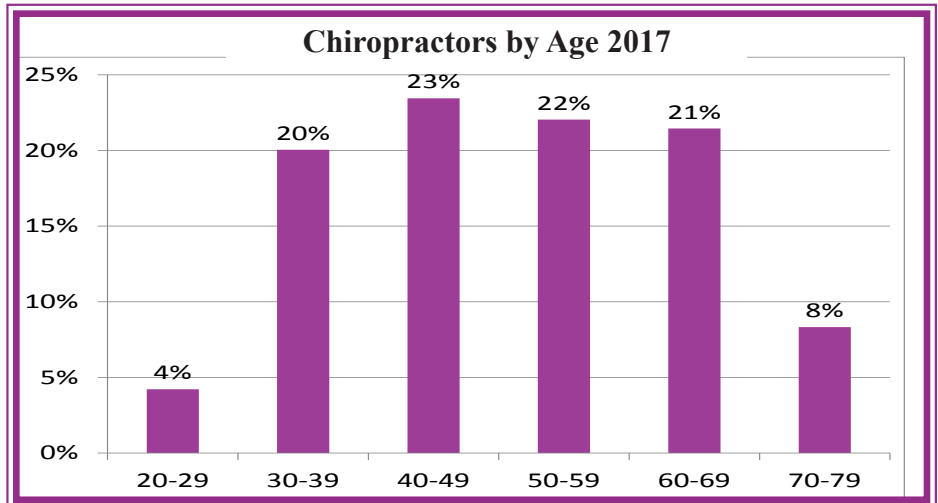
Chiropractors tended to be middle-aged with a majority (65 percent) between the ages of 30-59.

Chiropractors were predominantly white, with only 5 percent of chiropractors being made up of other races.

About 3 out of 4 chiropractors were male.

A review of the geographic distribution of chiropractors in the state revealed there were 14 counties (indicated in red on the map to the right) that do not have chiropractors listing an address living or working in the county.

*Note: Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.



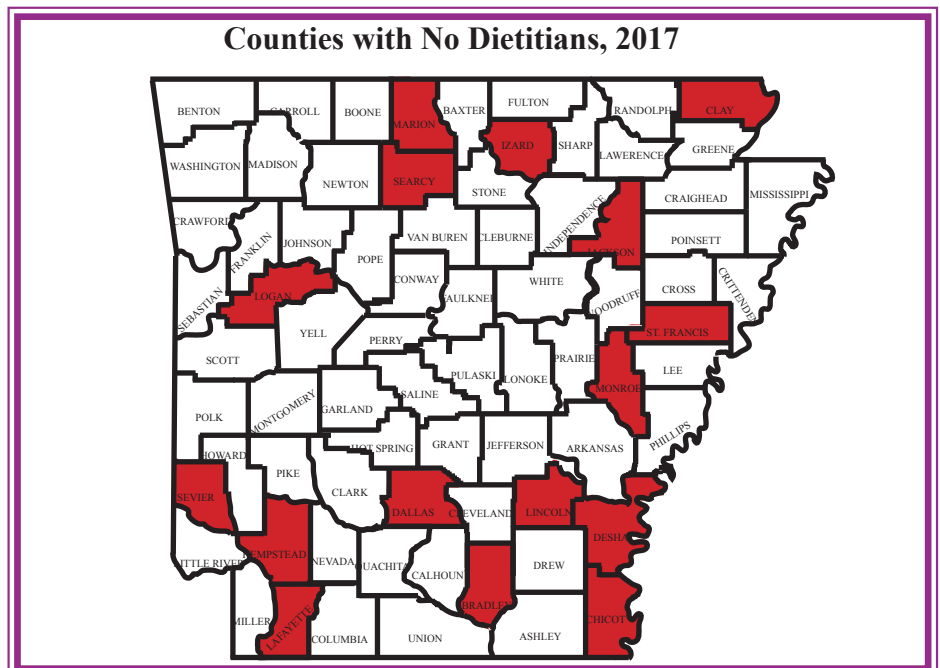
Dietitians

Source: Arkansas Dietetics Licensing Board

No age, gender or race data were provided for dietitians in 2017.

A review of the geographic distribution of dietitians in the state revealed there were 16 counties (indicated in red on the map to the right) that do not have dietitians listing an address living or working in the county.

*Note: Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.



Physical Therapists

Source: Arkansas Board of Physical Therapy

In 2017, there were 3,661 active physical therapists in the state.

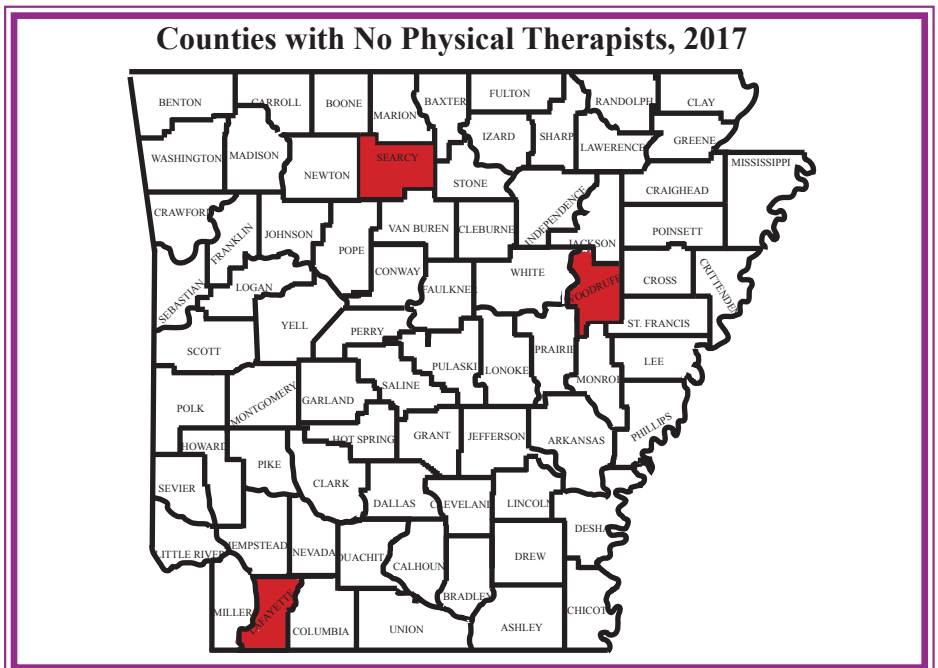
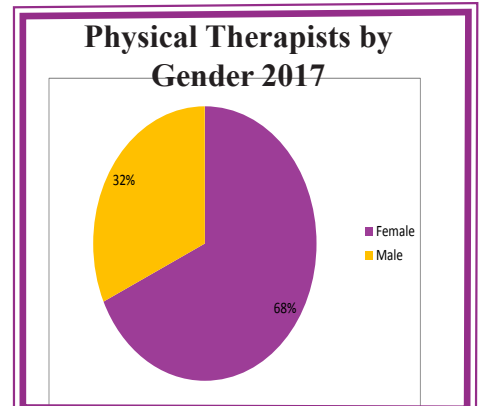
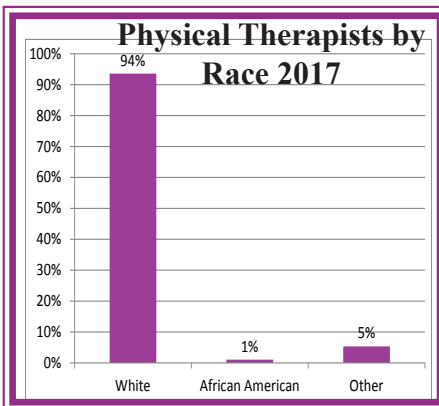
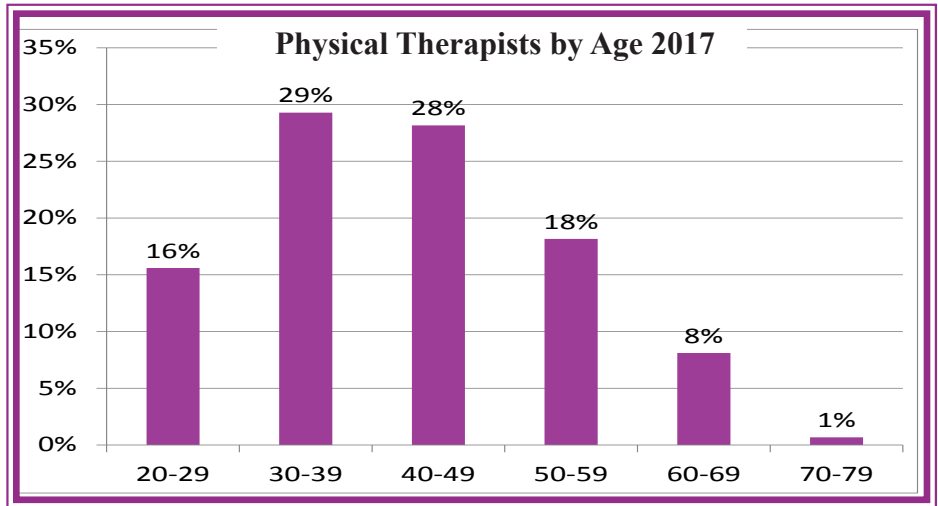
Physical therapists tended to be younger, with the majority (73 percent) being under the age of 50.

Approximately 9 in every 10 physical therapists were white.

Physical Therapists were predominantly male, with only 32% being female in 2017.

A review of the geographic distribution of physical therapists indicated that three counties (highlighted on the map) had no physical therapists with an address in that county.

*Note: Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.



Social Workers

Source: Arkansas Social Work Licensing Board

In 2017, there were 4,024 active social workers in the state.

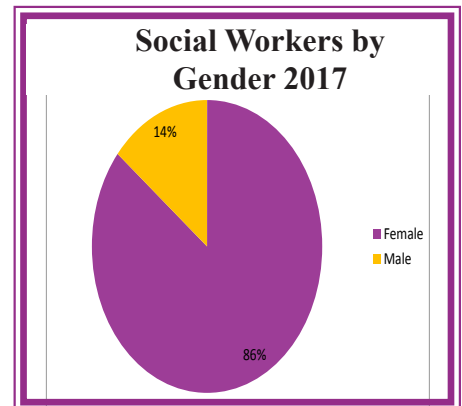
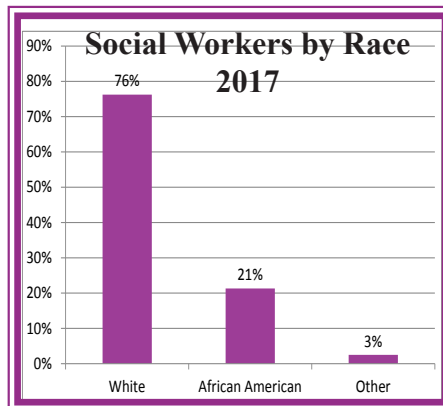
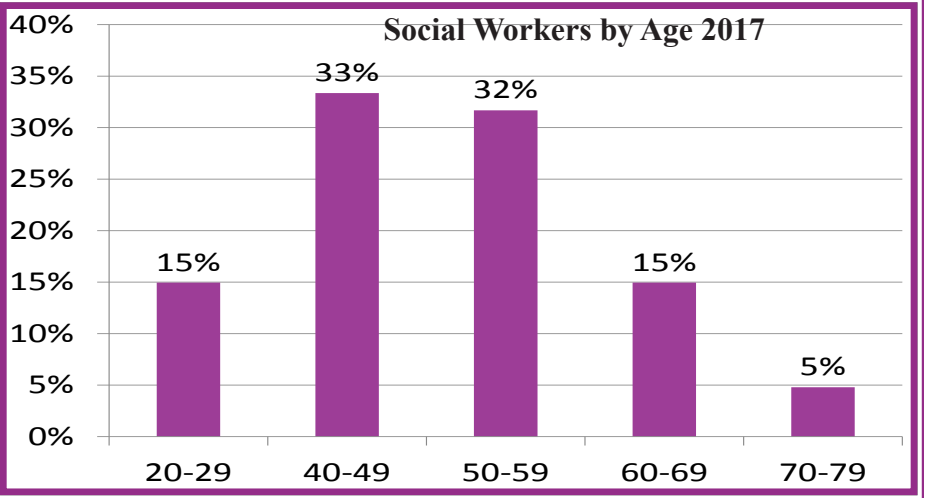
Social workers tended to be younger, with 80 percent being under the age of 60.

Social workers were more diverse than other health professions, with 21 percent identifying as a minority.

Social workers were predominately female, with only 14 percent being male in 2017.

A review of the geographic distribution reveals social workers appear to be active in all parts of the state.

*Note: Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.



Speech Therapists

Source: Arkansas Speech Pathology and Audiology Board

No demographic (age, gender or race) data were provided for speech therapists in 2017.

Conclusions

Increased diversity in the state's healthcare workforce could have positive effects on both the health of minority populations and the quality of care in Arkansas. This report examines demographic data provided by the state's various healthcare workforce licensing boards to the Arkansas Department of Health, and seeks to illustrate age, race, gender and geographic disparities found within various segments of the workforce. This report was made possible by the Arkansas General Assembly's 2009 mandate that required all licensing boards to provide this information on its licensees.

Despite Act 1489, some 2017 data were missing, preventing a complete analysis of workforce characteristics. Of the 17 professions contacted to report data for examination, two were missing race and gender data, one was missing age data and one was unable to provide data in compliance with reporting deadline. However, this is an improvement over previous years.

Racial disparities are a reality in Arkansas' workforce. The racial and ethnic diversity found in the state's population is not necessarily reflected in the healthcare system. Gender and age disparities are evident, as well.

Healthcare professionals are not, in many cases, equitably distributed throughout the state. While it is not unexpected that professionals would be clustered in the population centers found in the central and northwestern parts of the state, it is of some concern that some counties (for example, Lafayette and Calhoun counties) were consistently lacking active professionals. Such geographic disparities can be harmful when they prevent an individual or family from accessing needed care.

Few differences were evident between the data obtained this year and those obtained last year. While some professions may have improved or declined in terms of diversity, any differences were slight and possibly due to chance. To see true development and improvement (or decline) over time, frequent and complete reporting is required over a long period to allow for policy changes to manifest in workforce improvements.

This report highlights important issues in workforce diversity in Arkansas. While awareness is important in the early stages of demographic data collection and can form the basis of future development, systematic and ongoing demographic data collection, it is imperative to maintain momentum in understanding our changing workforce.

References

References

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