

Arkansas Minority Health Commission

Your Health. Our Priority.

2017 Arkansas Health Workforce Report

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Executive Summary

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

- The majority of workers in health occupations are female. Dental hygienists, for example, were 99 percent female, specialty surgeons were 95 percent male, and speech therapists were 96 percent female. Pharmacists, specialty nurses and physical therapists enjoyed the most equity in terms of gender.
- Each profession was predominately white. In fact, there were only three professions (i.e., general nurses, specialty nurses and social workers) in which the proportion of white workers was less than 90 percent. Optometrists were 98 percent white, making them the least diverse profession with respect to race, whereas social workers were 79 percent white and 17 percent African American, making them the most diverse group in 2016. Race was not available for dental assistants or dietitians.
- 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 45 counties, and general surgeons lack professionals from 34 counties. Other professions enjoyed much greater dispersion. For example, dental assistants, general physicians, nurses, pharmacists and physical therapists appeared to be active in all 75 counties.
- 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. Four of the seventeen healthcare professions covered in this report failed to report some or all of the required demographic data, compared to 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 2016, there were 1,742 dentists licensed in Arkansas.

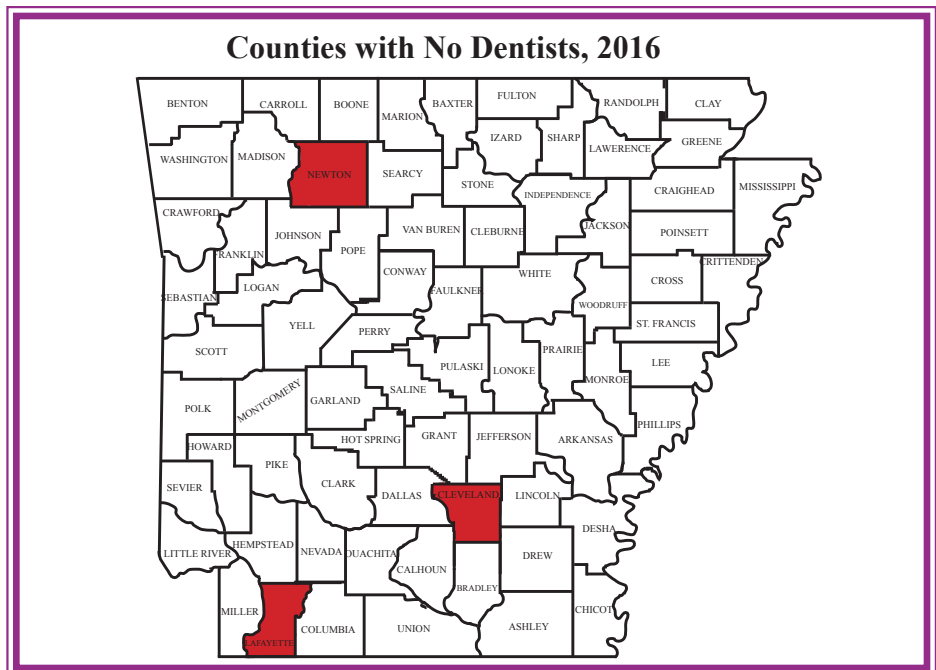
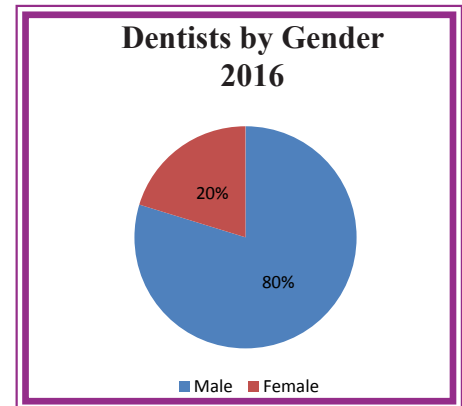
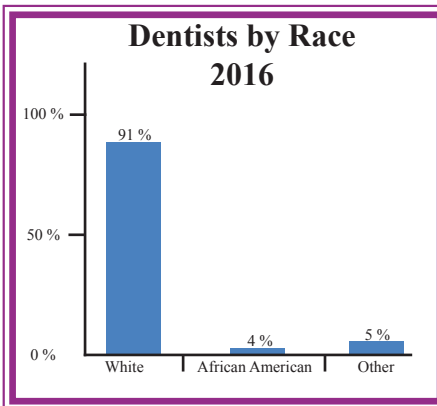
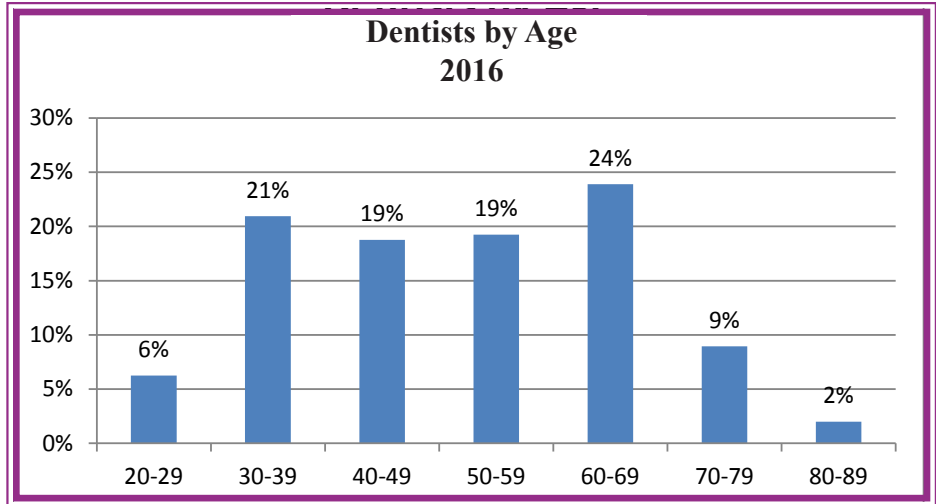
In 2016, dentists tended to be middle aged, with a majority (66 percent) reporting ages between 40 and 69.

In addition, the majority of dentists were white with only 9 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 three 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

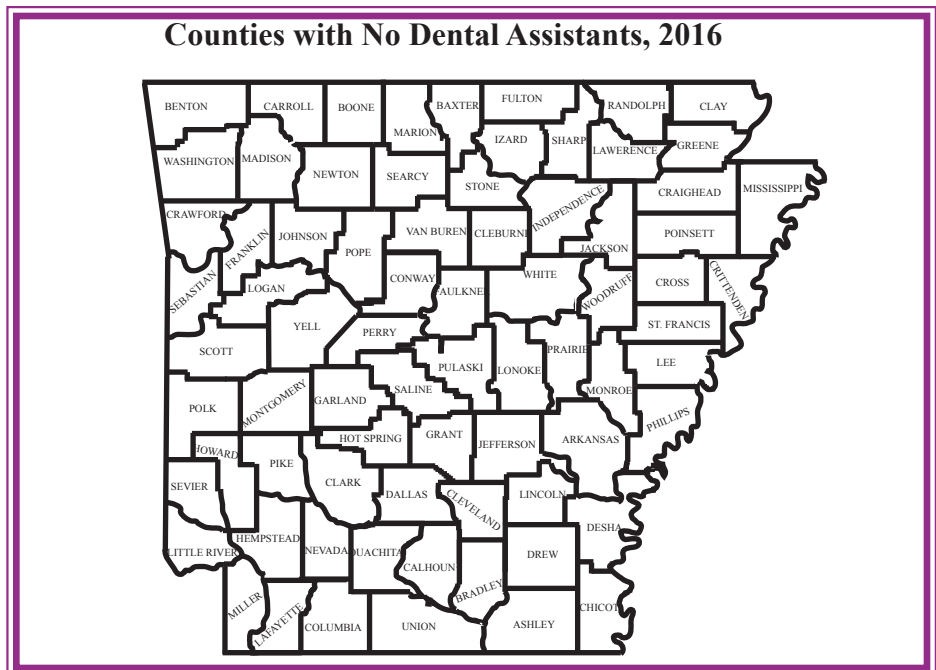
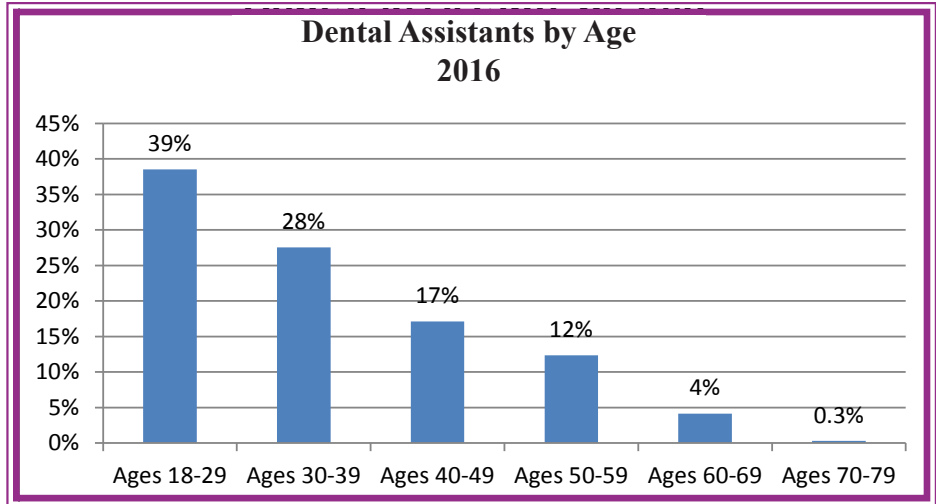
Source: Arkansas Board of Dental Examiners

In 2016, there were 5,239 dental assistants practicing in Arkansas.

In general, dental assistants tended to be young – more than 80 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

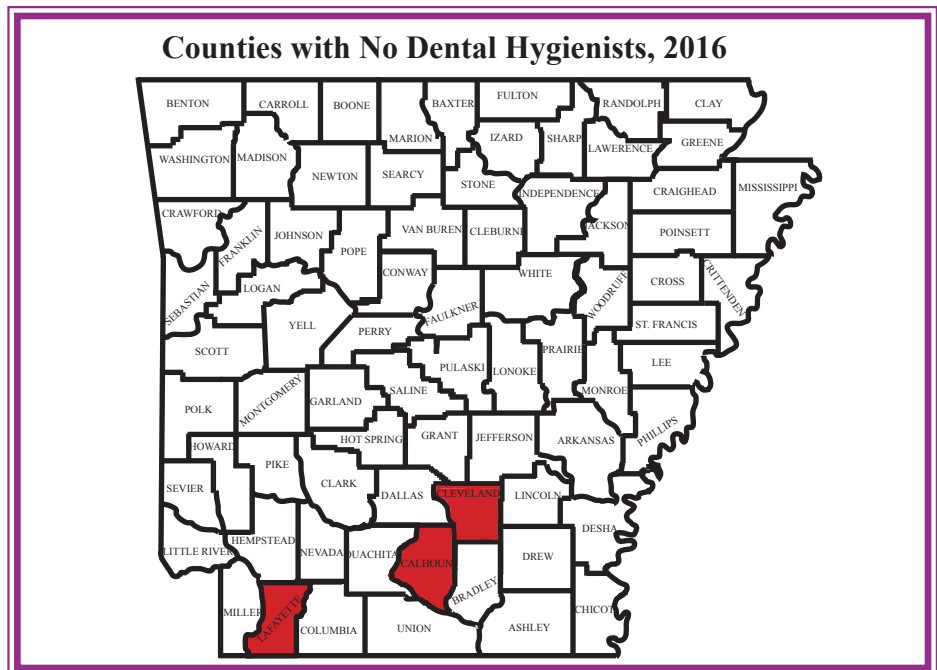
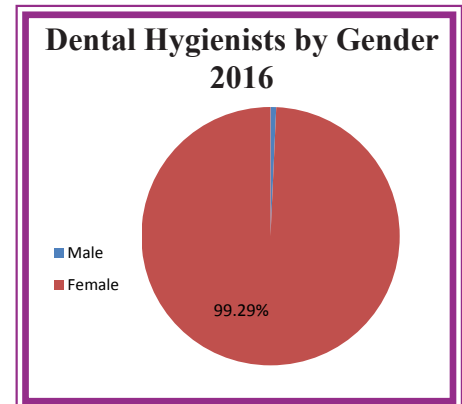
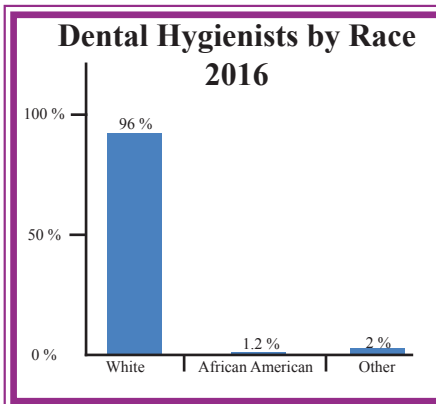
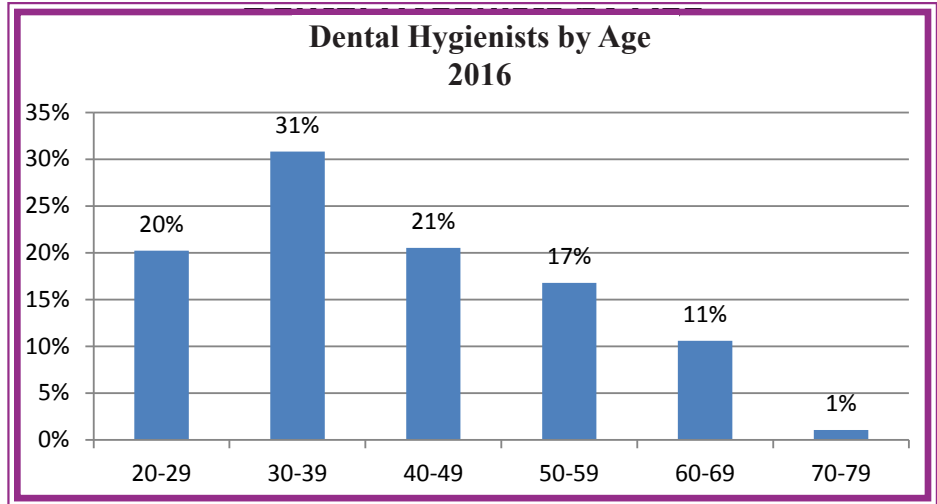
Source: Arkansas Board of Dental Examiners

In 2016, there were 1,987 dental hygienists practicing in Arkansas.

Dental hygienists tended to be young, with almost 75 percent being under the age of 50. Dental hygienists were also primarily white, with African Americans and other racial minorities making up 3.2 percent of the profession.

A review of the geographic distribution of dental assistants indicated that there were three counties in the southern portion of the state - Lafayette, Calhoun and Cleveland counties - 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

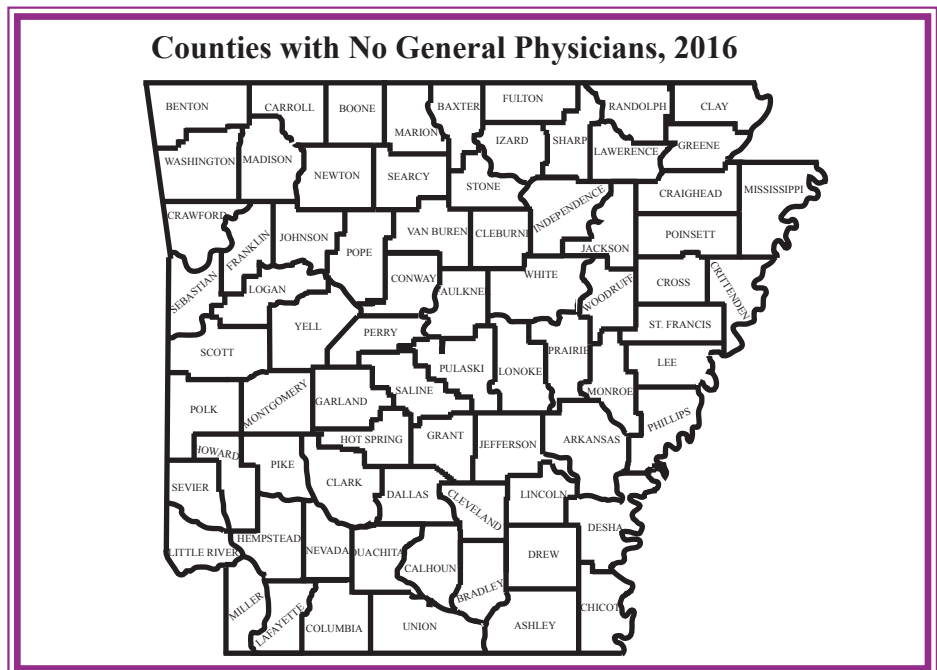
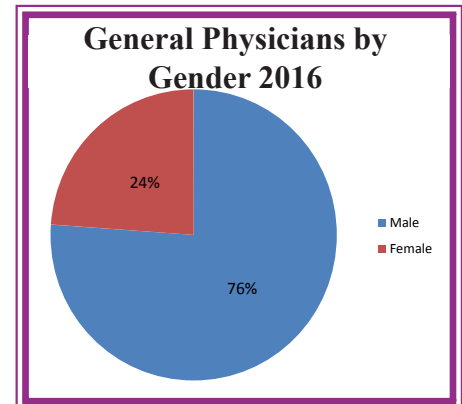
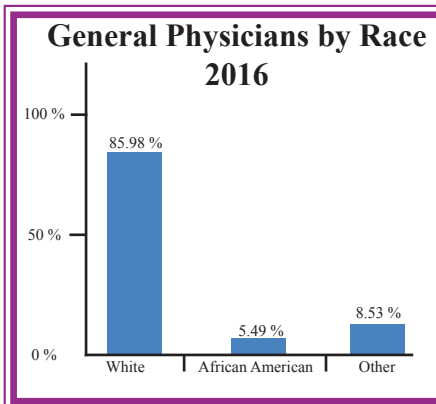
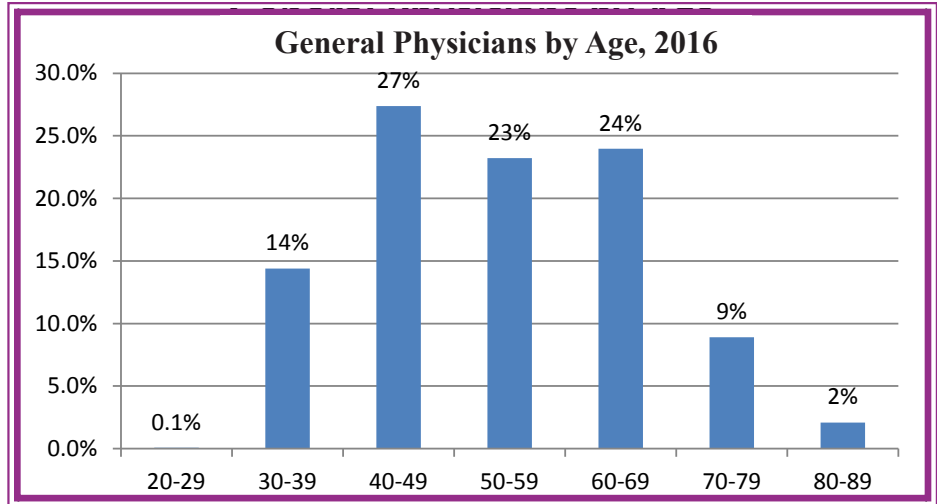
In 2016, there were 2,588 general physicians active in Arkansas.

Practically all general physicians were over the age of 30; the majority (74 percent) of physicians were between the ages of 40 and 70.

General physicians were about 86 percent white.

A majority of general physicians were male, only about 24 percent of Arkansas general physicians were female.

A review of the geographic distribution of general physicians indicated that every county in the state had at least one physician.



Specialty Physicians

Source: Arkansas Medical Board

In 2016, there were 3,621 specialty physicians active in Arkansas.

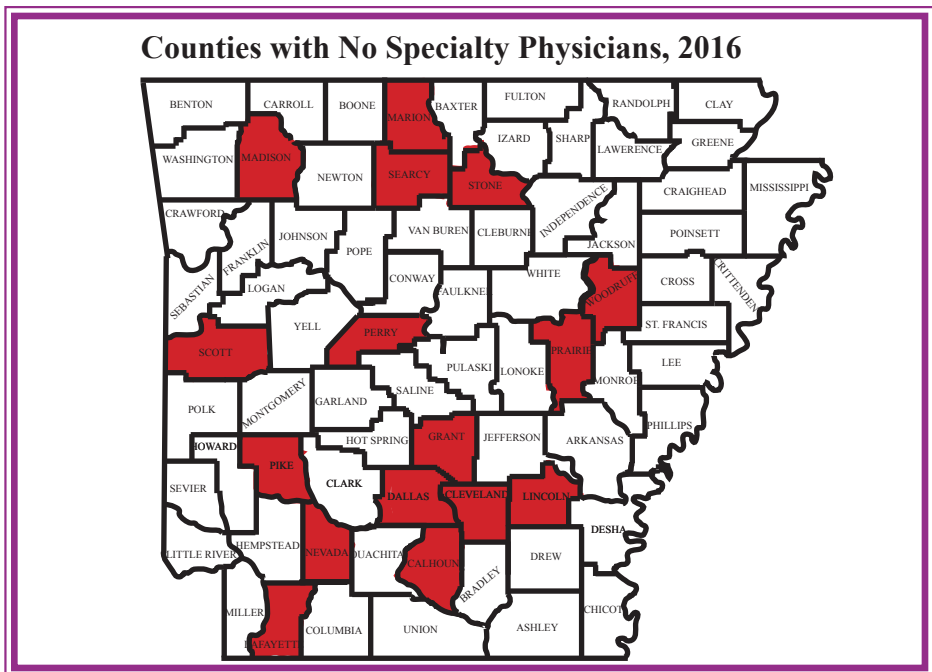
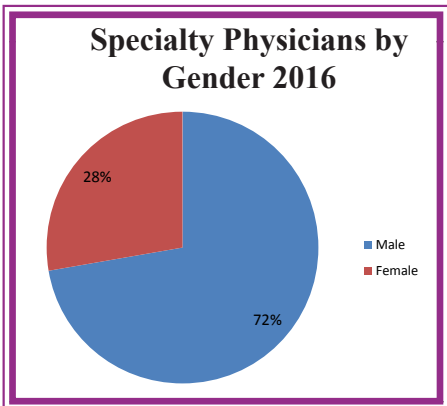
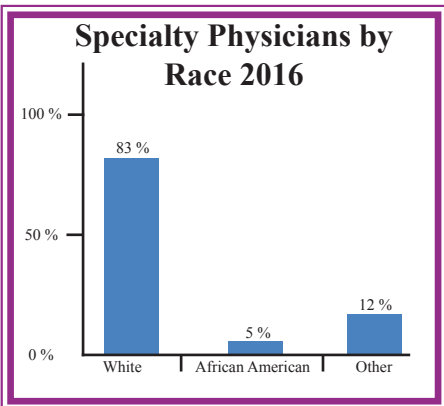
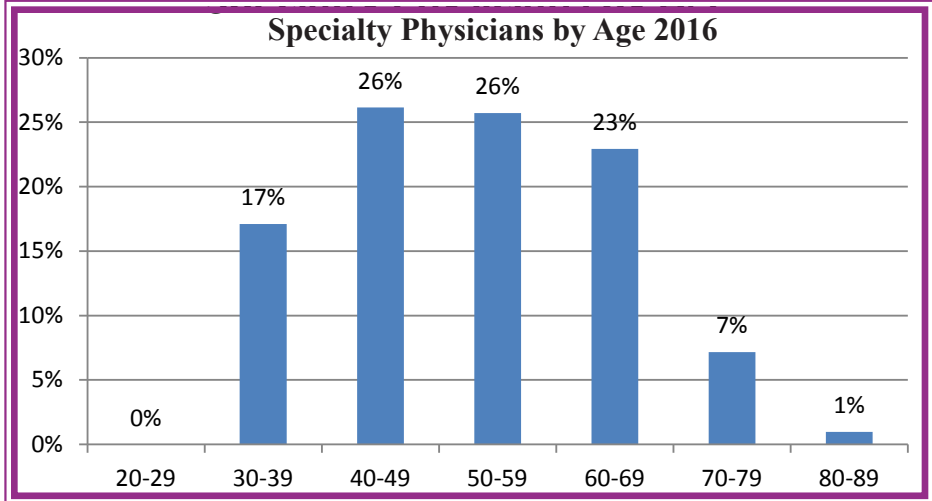
No specialty physicians were under the age of 30, presumably because of the additional training needed for specialty practice. The majority (75 percent) were between the ages of 40 and 69.

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

A majority of specialty physicians were male, only about 28 percent of Arkansas specialty physicians were female.

A review of the geographic distribution of specialty physicians indicated that 16 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 2016, there were 223 general surgeons active in Arkansas.

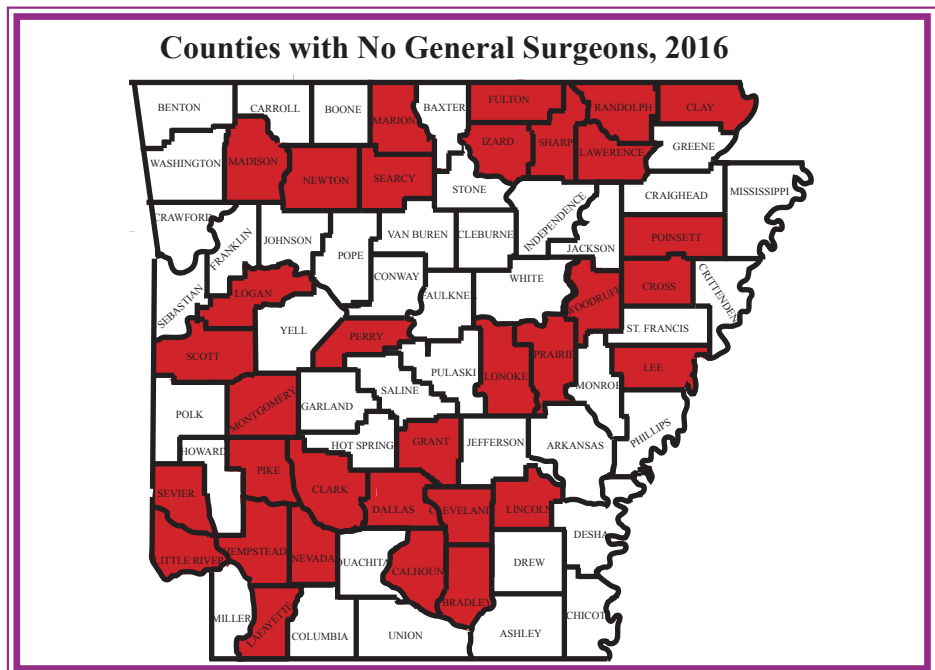
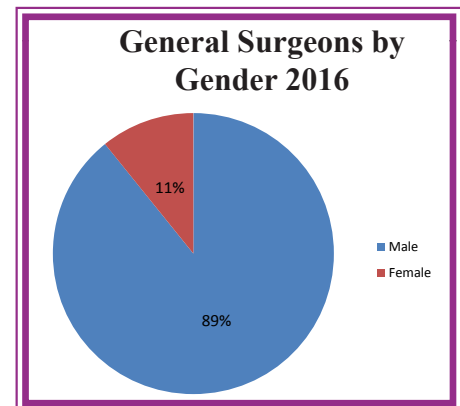
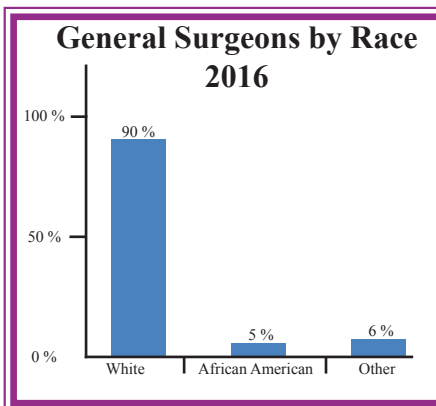
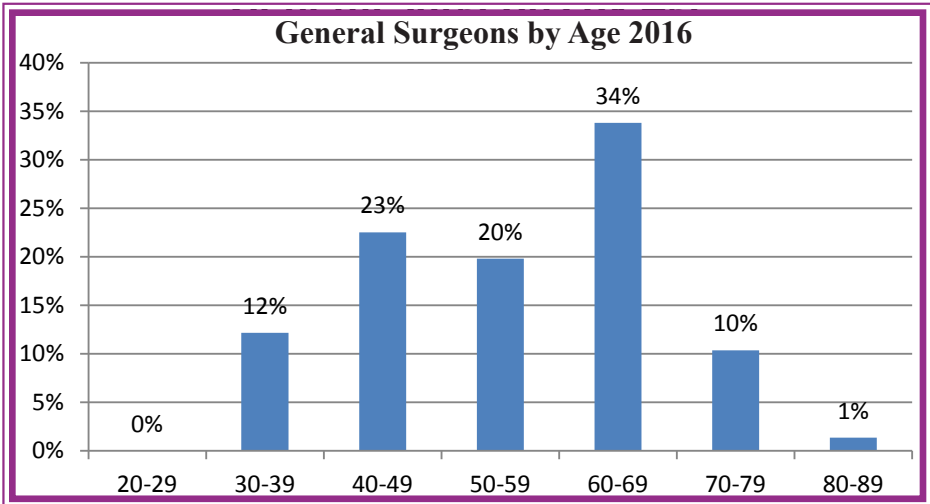
The majority (88 percent) of general surgeons were over the age of 40.

General surgeons were predominately white, but about 11 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 34 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 2016, there were 340 specialty surgeons in Arkansas.

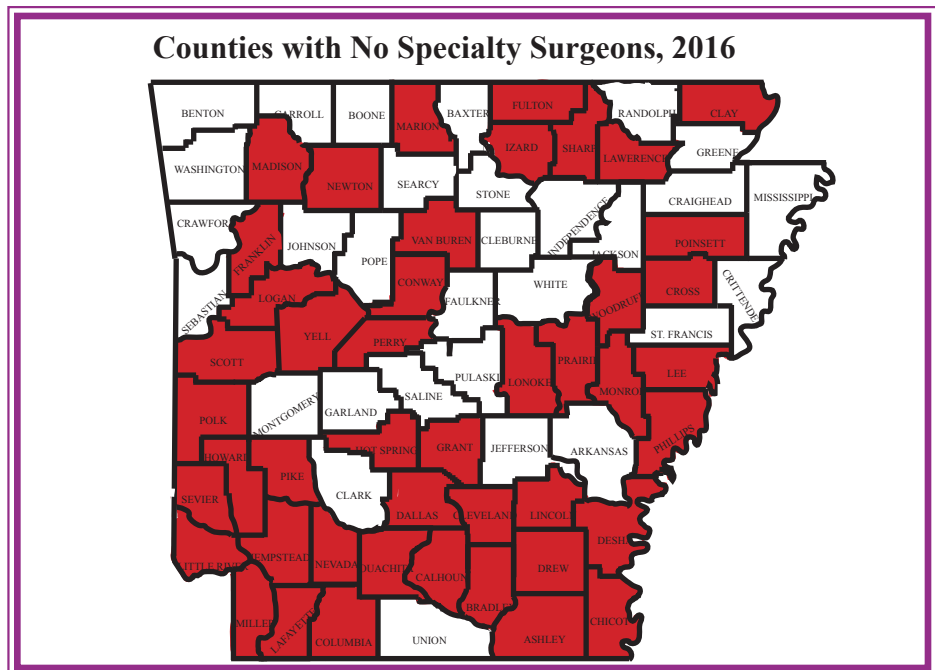
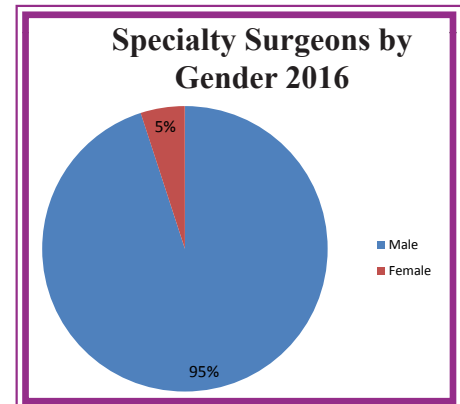
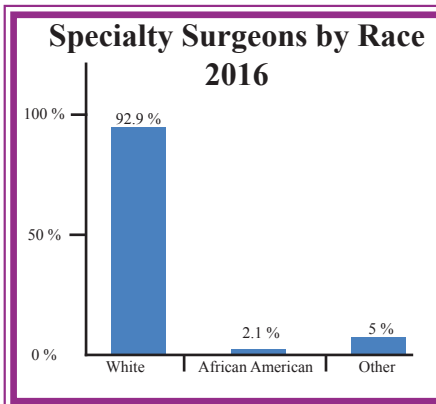
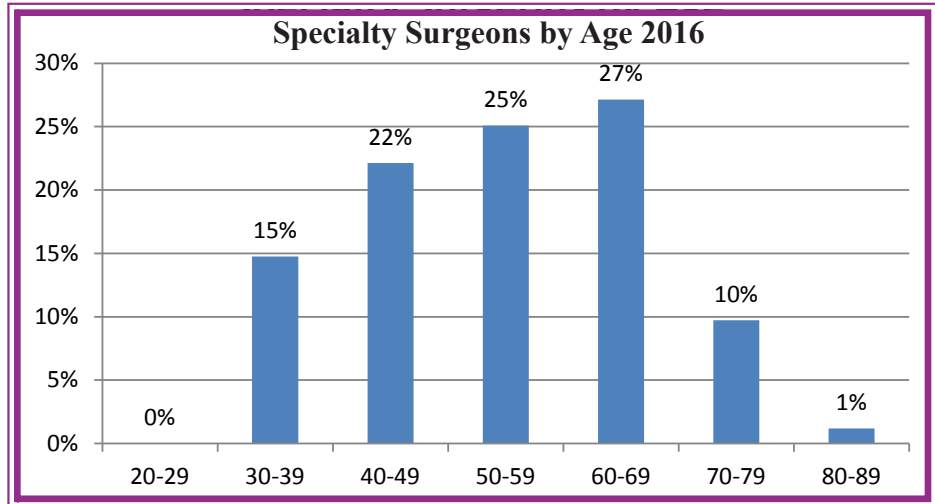
No surgeons were under the age of 30, presumably because of the years of additional training required. The majority (74 percent) were between the ages of 40 and 69.

Specialty surgeons were overwhelmingly white, with only 7.1 percent identifying as other races.

Additionally, specialty surgeons were predominately male at 95 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.



Nurses

Source: Arkansas Nursing Board

In 2016, there were 56,520 active nurses in Arkansas.

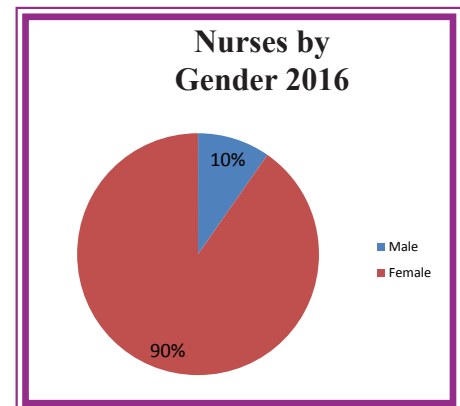
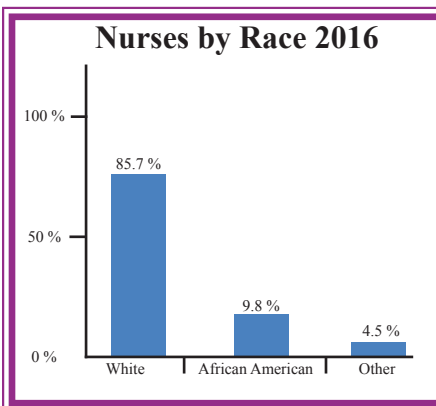
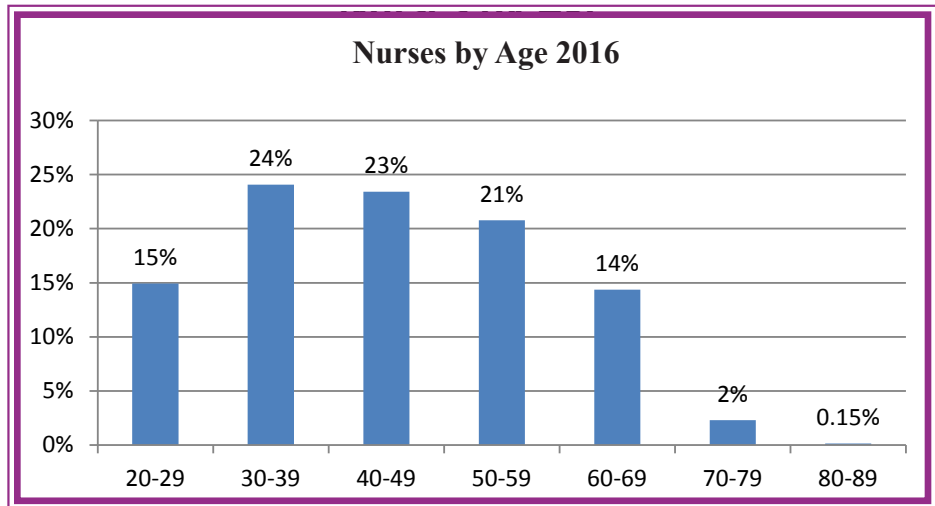
Generally, nurses tended to be younger, with 62 percent being under the age of 50 and more than 15 percent under the age of 30.

Nurses tended to be white, but nearly 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 2016, there were 4,195 active specialty nurses (including certified nursing midwives and registered nurse anesthetologists) in Arkansas.

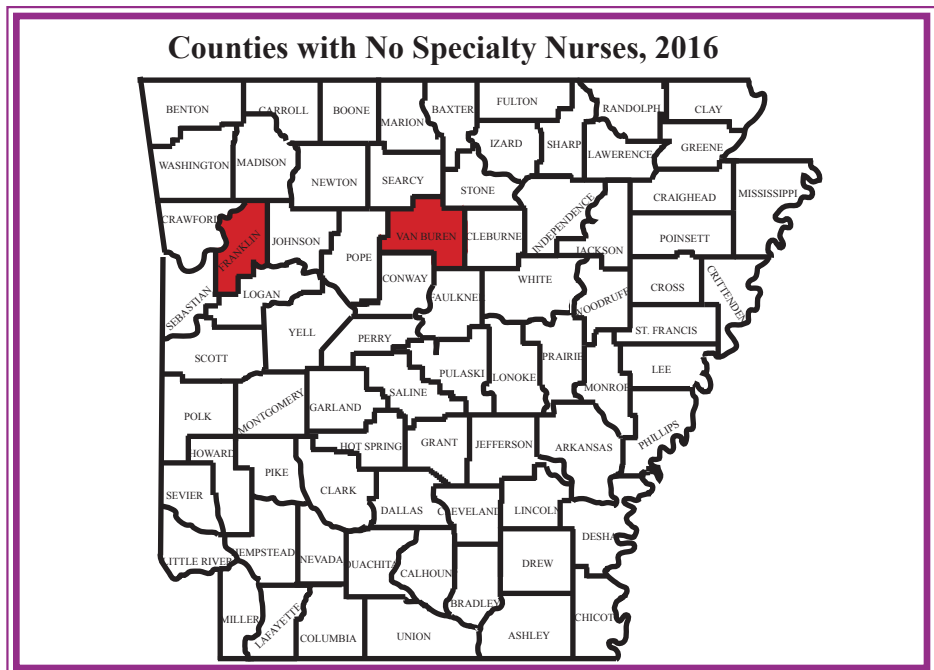
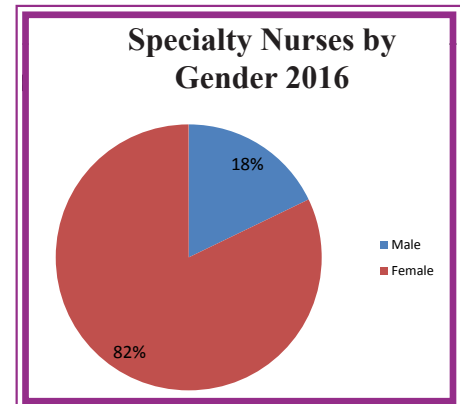
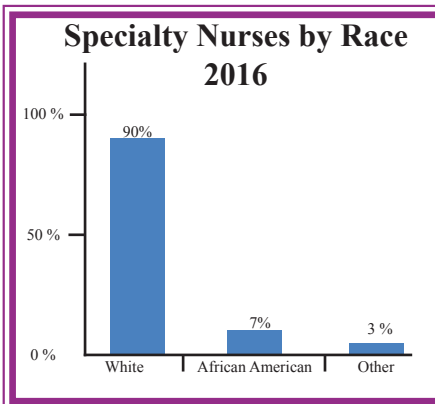
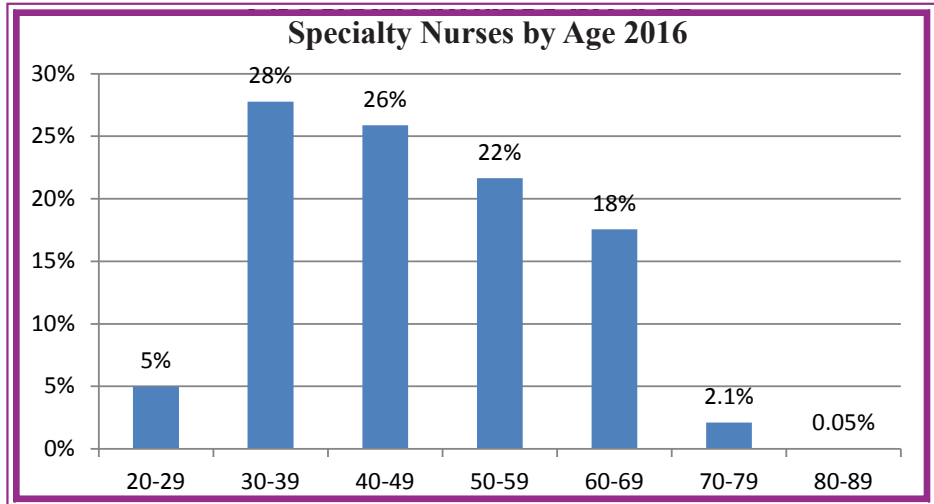
Specialized nurses tended to be a little older, with nearly half (48 percent) between the ages of 40 and 59 and another 18 percent between 60 and 69 years.

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

Specialty nurses tended to be female, making up 82 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 2016, there were 473 active optometrists in the state.

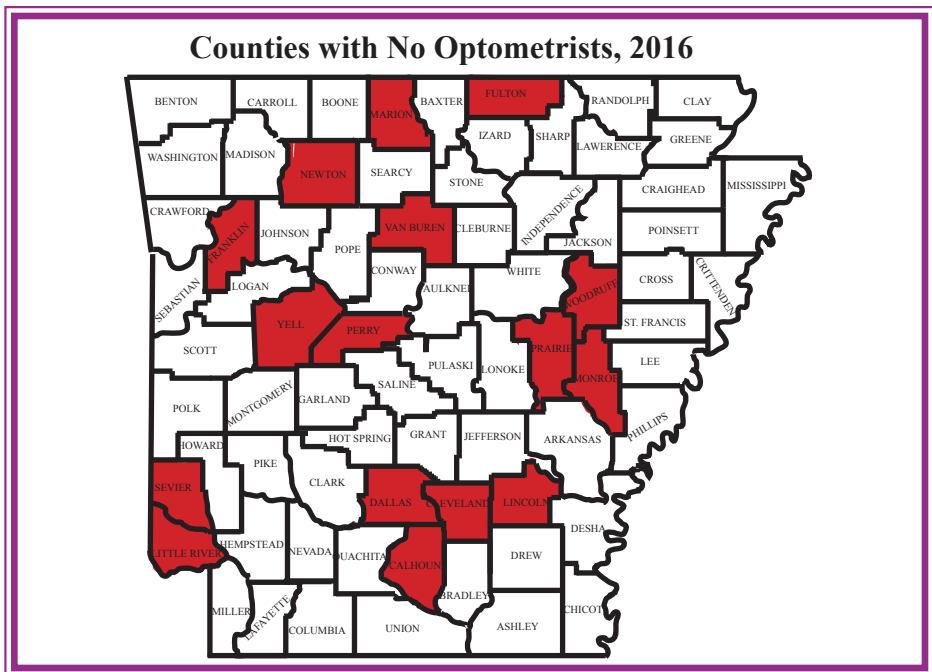
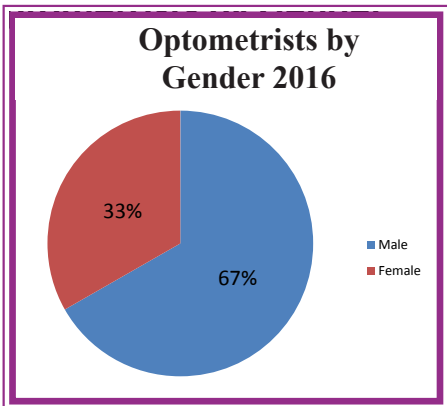
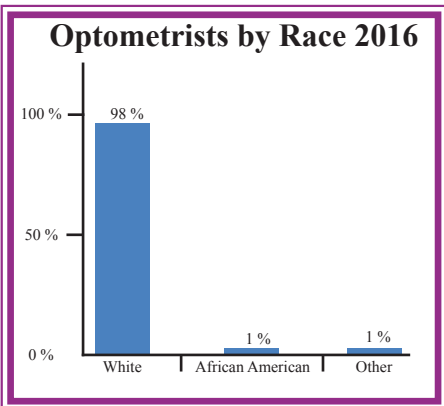
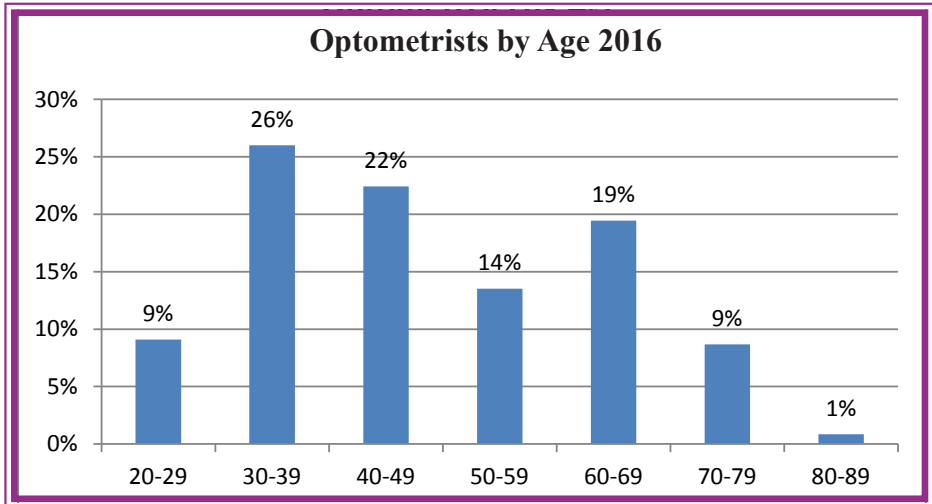
Optometrists tended to be younger, with 57 percent being below the age of 50.

In addition, optometrists were generally white, with other races and ethnicities making up less than 2 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 16 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 2016, there were 5,779 active pharmacists in the state.

Pharmacists tended to be younger, with 58 reporting ages under 50 years.

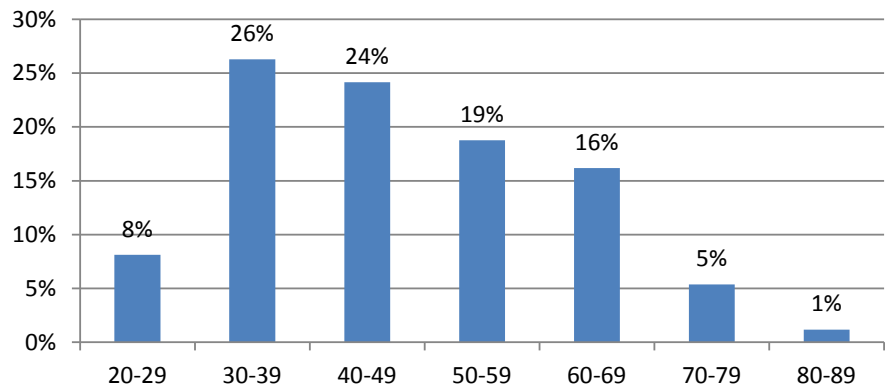
About 9 out of every 10 pharmacists in the state were white, and around 10 percent were of other races.

Pharmacists were fairly evenly divided between males and females.

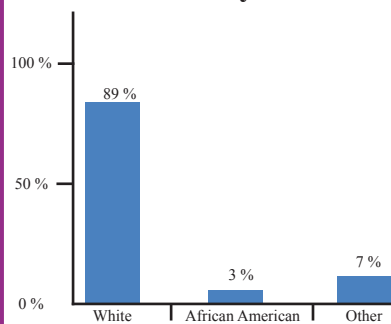
A review of the geographic distribution of pharmacists in the state indicated a relatively even distribution across the counties with a slight concentration in urban areas. At least one pharmacist reported a work or home address for every county in the state.

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

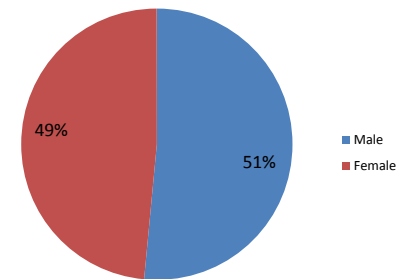
Pharmacists by Age 2016



Pharmacists by Race 2016



Pharmacists by Gender 2016



Counties with No Pharmacists, 2016



Podiatrists

Source: Arkansas State Board of Podiatry Examiners

In 2016, there were 117 active podiatrists in Arkansas.

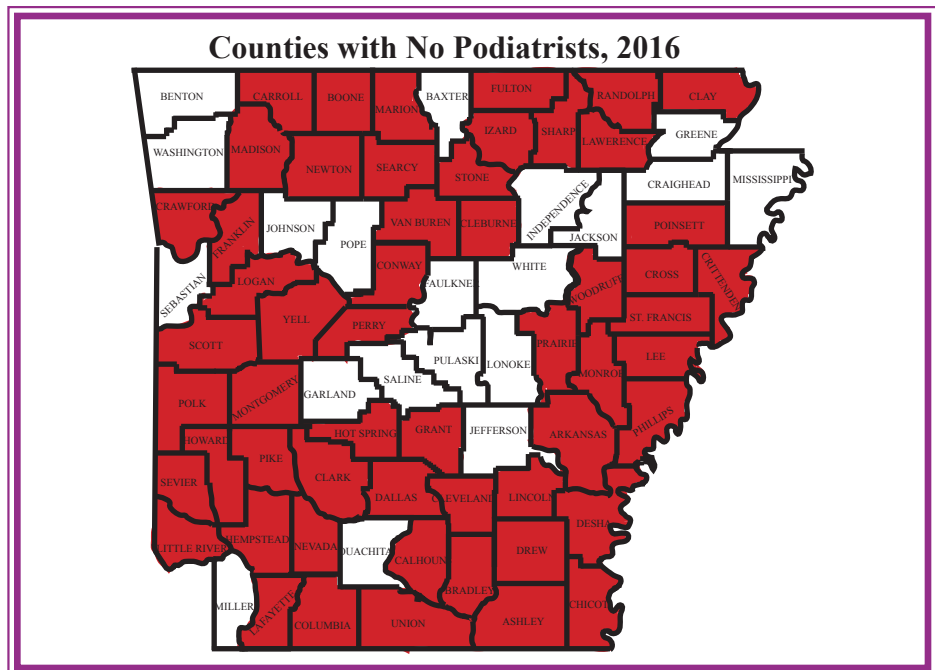
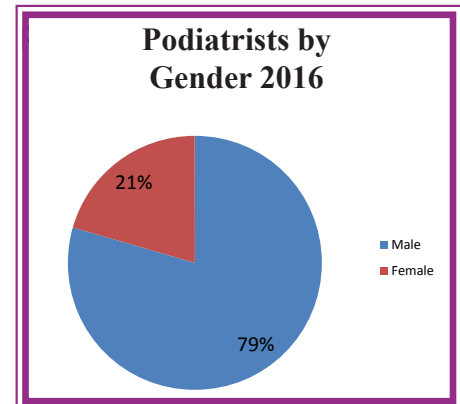
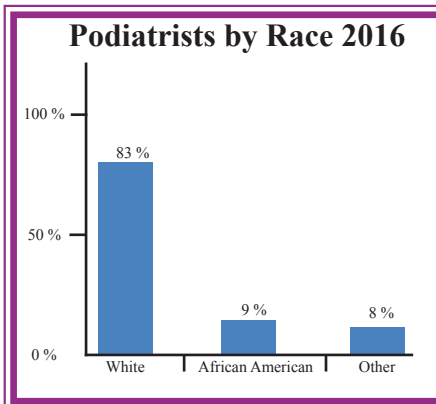
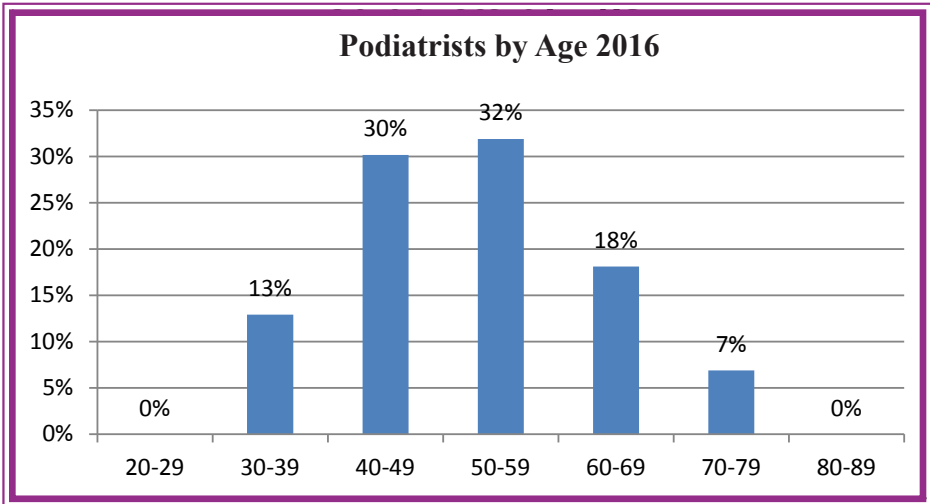
Podiatrists tended to be middle-aged with 80 percent falling between the ages of 40 and 69.

Although 83 percent of podiatrists are white, about 17 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 54 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 2016, there were 627 active chiropractors in Arkansas.

Chiropractors tended to be middle-aged with a majority (72 percent) between the ages of 30-59.

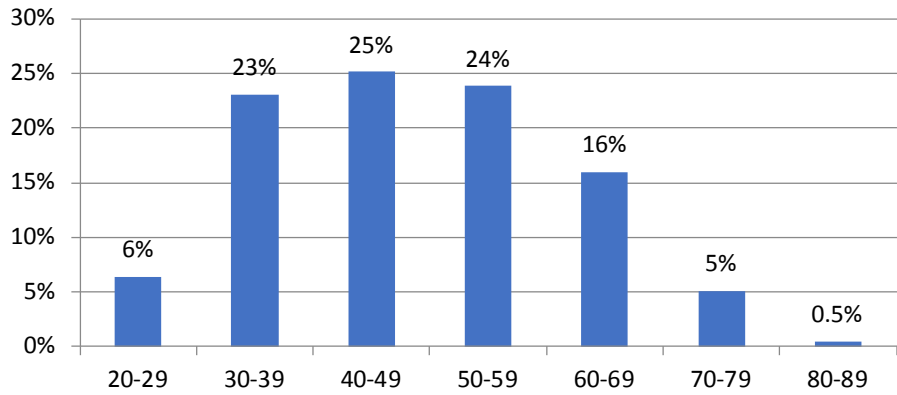
Chiropractors were predominantly white, with only 4.4 percent of chiropractors being made up of other races.

About 3 out of 4 chiropractors were male.

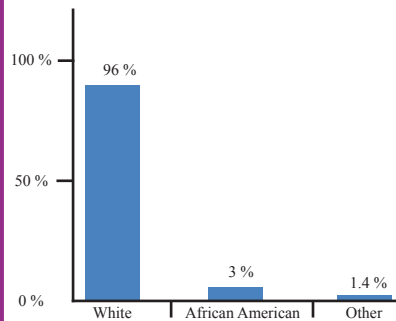
A review of the geographic distribution of chiropractors in the state revealed there were 14 counties (indicated in red on the map to the right) that do not have chiropractors listing an address living or working in the county.

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

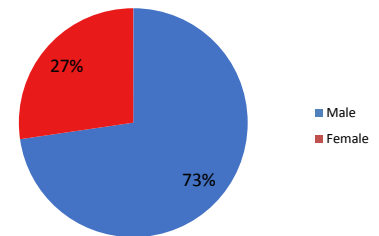
Chiropractors by Age 2016



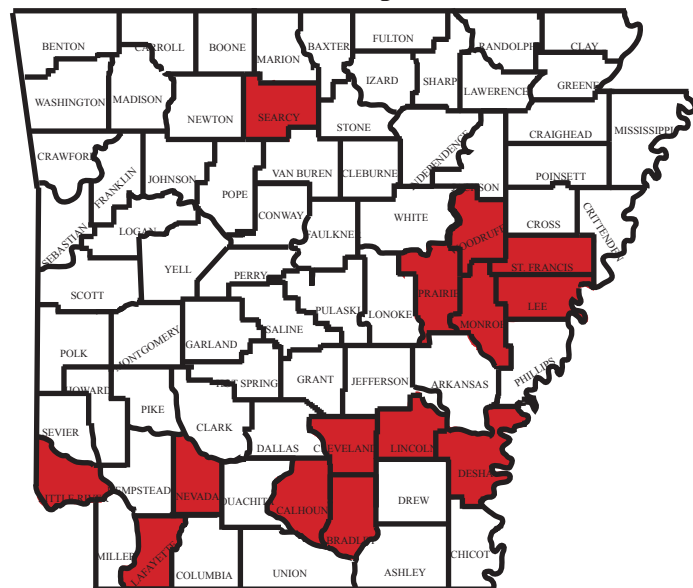
Chiropractors by Race 2016



Chiropractors by Gender 2016



Counties with No Chiropractors, 2016



Dietitians

Source: Arkansas Dietetics Licensing Board

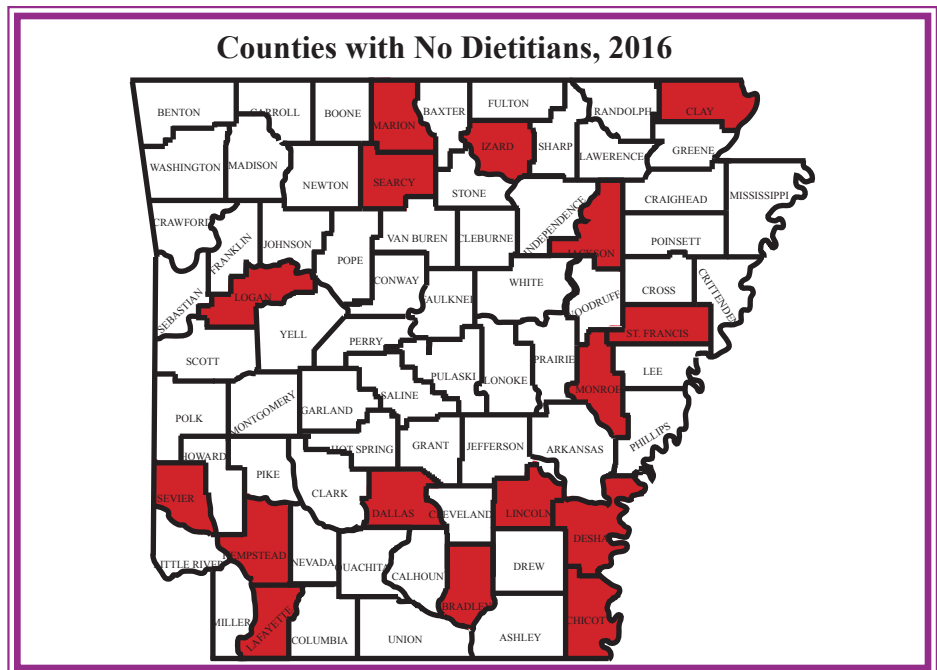
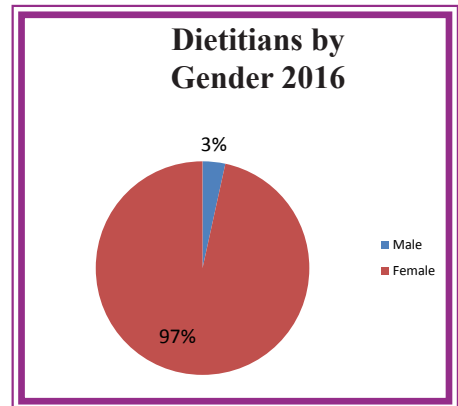
In 2016, there were 790 active dietitians in the state.

No age or race data were provided for dietitians in 2016.

Dietitians were overwhelmingly female, with only 3 percent male.

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 2016, there were 3,483 active physical therapists in the state.

Physical therapists tended to be younger, with the majority (75 percent) being under the age of 50.

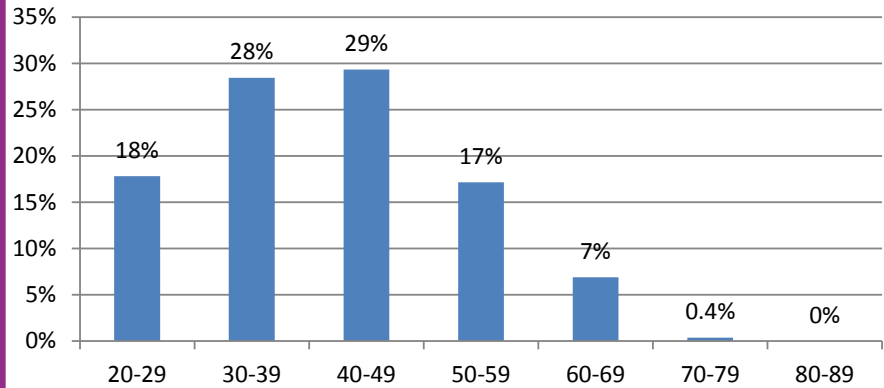
Approximately 9 in every 10 physical therapists were white.

There was no gender data provided for physical therapists in 2016.

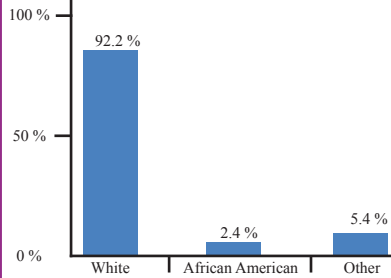
A review of the geographic distribution of physical therapists throughout the state revealed a common pattern, with higher proportions located in urban areas. However, there were not counties with no physical therapist living or working in that county.

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

Physical Therapists by Age 2016



Physical Therapists by Race 2016



Counties with No Physical Therapists, 2016



Social Workers

Source: Arkansas Social Work Licensing Board

In 2016, there were 3,330 active social workers in the state.

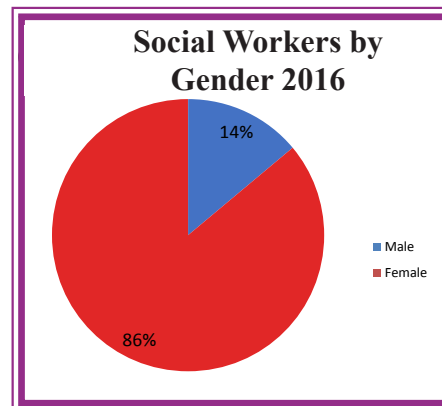
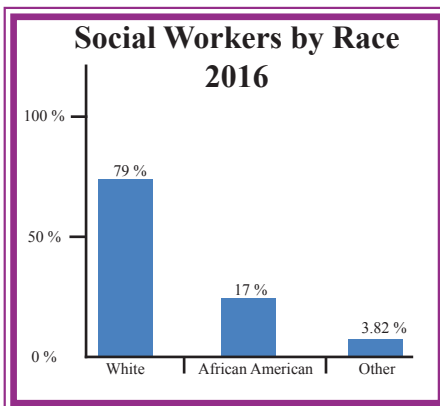
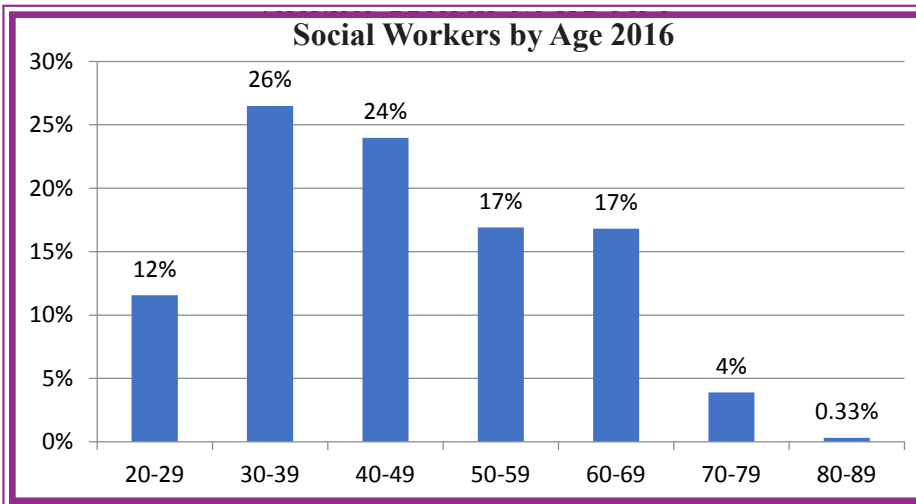
Social workers tended to be younger, with 62 percent being under the age of 50.

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 2016.

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

In 2016, there were 2,691 active speech therapists in the state.

Speech therapists tended to be younger, with 77 percent being under the age of 50.

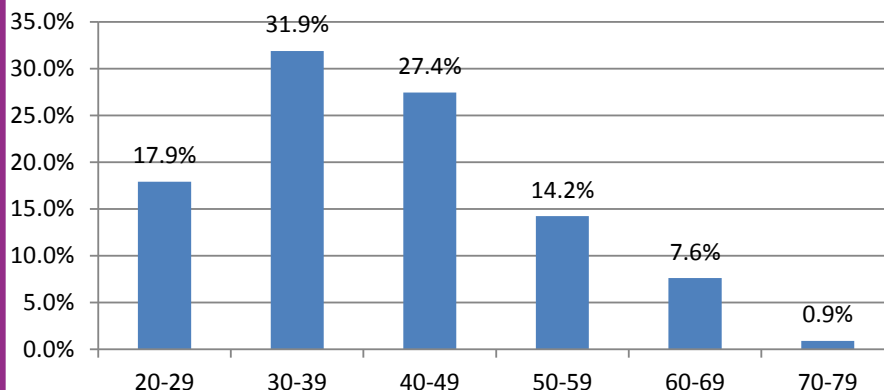
Speech therapists tended to be white, with only 6.4 percent identifying with other racial groups.

Speech therapists were also overwhelmingly female, with only 4 percent being male in 2016.

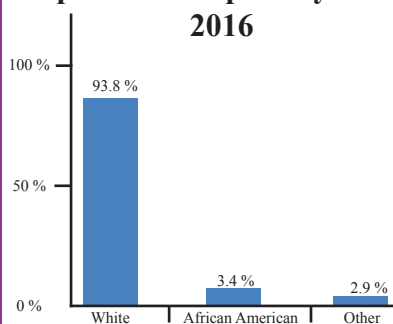
There was no geographic data provided for speech therapists in 2016.

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

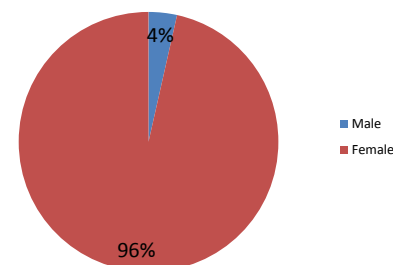
Speech Therapists by Age 2016



Speech Therapists by Race 2016



Speech Therapists by Gender 2016



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 2016 data were missing, preventing a complete analysis of workforce characteristics. Of the 17 professions reporting data for examination, two were missing race data, one was missing age data, one was missing gender data, and one was missing county data. 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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