

Running the Numbers

*A Periodic Feature to Inform North Carolina Health Care Professionals
About Current Topics in Health Statistics*

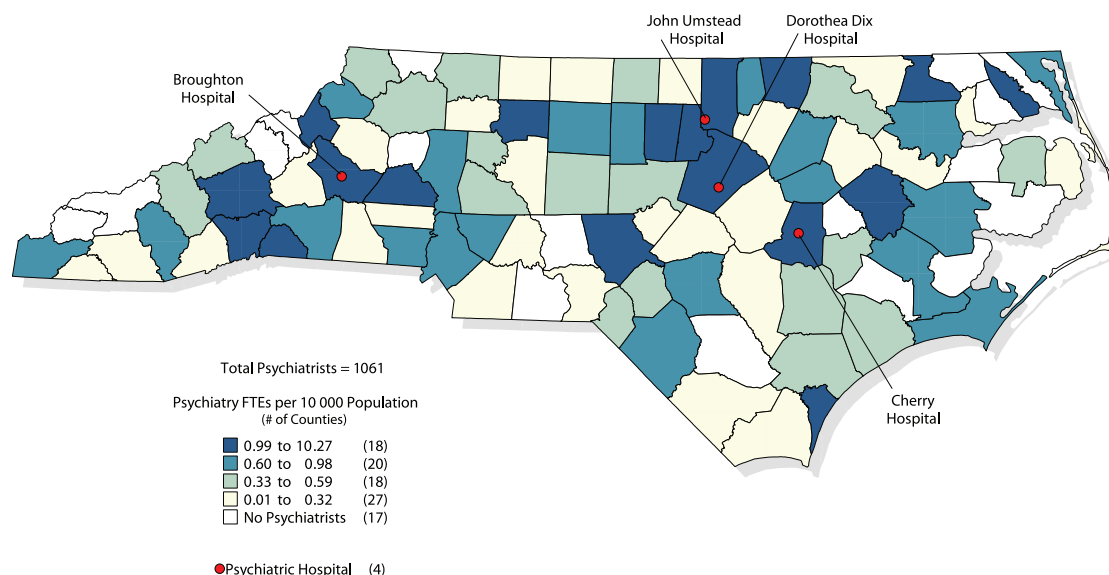
North Carolina Health Professions Data System
<http://www.schsr.unc.edu/hp/index.html>

Mental Health Professionals in North Carolina

Nearly one-third of nonelderly adults and one-sixth of children experience a mental health disorder in their lifetimes. Thirteen percent of Americans receive some form of mental health treatment each year including inpatient treatment (0.9%), outpatient treatment (7.9%), and behavioral medication (10%).

There are 3 broad classifications of mental health patients: (1) persons with developmentally disabilities, (2) persons with substance abuse disorders, and (3) persons with mental illnesses. Within this third group, there are numerous illnesses of varying severity. A severely mentally ill person who suffers from schizophrenia or bipolar disorder may have trouble functioning independently in society. People with moderate depression or posttraumatic stress disorder may be appropriately treated with medication. Within mental health there exists a wide range of health issues that may not require intense medical treatment but which may affect a patient's well-being.

Figure 1.
Psychiatrist Full-Time Equivalents per 10 000 Population North Carolina, 2004



Source: LINC, 2005; North Carolina Health Professions Data System, with data derived from the North Carolina Medical Board, 2004; NC DHHS, MHDDSAS, 2005.

Produced by: North Carolina Health Professions Data System, Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

*Psychiatrists include active (or unknown activity status), instate, nonfederal, nonresident-in-training physicians who indicate a primary specialty of psychiatry, child psychiatry, psychoanalysis, psychosomatic medicine, addiction/chemical dependency, forensic psychiatry, or geriatric psychiatry, and secondary specialties in child psychiatry and forensic psychiatry.

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Research estimates suggest there are 64 000 children and 49 000 adults with developmental disabilities in North Carolina. All together, research suggests 400 000 North Carolinians suffer from substance abuse disorders. Research also estimates there are 66 000 children and adolescents and 356 000 adults with serious mental illnesses within the state.

Among people with more moderate mental illnesses, depression is one of the most common ailments. According to the National Center on Drug Use and Health, 9% of North Carolina residents ages 12 to 17 years old suffered from at least one depressive episode in 2005. Among adults in the state, nearly 8% suffered at least one episode.

According to the Health Professions Data System at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 44 North Carolina counties qualified as Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas in 2004 because they had fewer than one-third of a psychiatrist for every 10 000 people. Between 1999 and 2004, 48 counties experienced a decline in psychiatrists relative to the change in population, 5 counties lost the psychiatrists they had, and 12 counties had none and gained none. In other words, during that 5-year period, nearly two-thirds of North Carolina counties either had no psychiatrists or experienced a decline in supply. The map in Figure 1 shows the uneven distribution of psychiatrists across counties and their density in relation to the state's major mental health facilities.

Compared to the rest of the nation, North Carolina ranks 20th in the density of psychiatrists. In 2005 North Carolina had 1091 psychiatrists in practice, or 1.2 per 10 000 population. Regardless of rank, North Carolina is well below the overall national average. In 2005 the United States had 41 958 psychiatrists in practice, or 1.42 per 10 000 population. For psychologists, North Carolina fell below the national average with 2.58 psychologists per 10 000 population compared to 3.35 for the nation. It is only in the social work profession where the state exceeds the national average with 17.9 per 10 000 compared to 15.8 per 10 000 population.

REFERENCES

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