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Residency Program Teaches Doctors About Addiction Treatment

A national training program launched last year is seeking to address the scarcity of physicians trained in treating addiction.

The program, sponsored by the American Board of Addiction Medicine (ABAM), aims to attract more doctors to the field, The Washington Post reports.

A report released this summer by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University found only about 10 percent of the 22 million Americans with a drug or alcohol problem receive treatment.

The report concludes that "the vast majority of people in need of addiction treatment do not receive anything that approximates evidence-based care.

According to the CASA report, only about 1,200 of the 985,375 practicing doctors in the United States are trained in addiction medicine. The new addiction medicine training program is being offered at 10 academic medical centers across the nation.

Participants have finished training in another specialty, such as internal medicine and family practice. They are completing one- or two-year residencies in addiction medicine.

The need for doctors trained in addiction medicine will grow as more Americans gain health insurance coverage under the Affordable Care Act, the newspaper reports.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, up to one-third of the 30 million Americans who may receive coverage under the law have a substance abuse or mental health problem. Funding for the new residencies remains a problem.

The 10 medical centers participating in the program agreed to train 28 physicians in the first year, but fewer than half the slots were funded. When the program was announced in 2011, Dr. Kevin Kunz, ABAM Foundation President, said his group anticipated accrediting an additional 10 residencies in 2012.