

# “Medical School Closures, Market Adjustment, and Mortality in the Flexner Report Era”

Karen Clay

## Abstract

Early twentieth century efforts to overhaul the quality of medical education in the United States (principally between 1905 and 1915 – the “Flexner Report Era”) led to a steep decline in the number of medical schools and medical graduates. In this paper, we examine the consequences of these medical school closures for county-level physicians, nurses, and midwives per capita and their consequences for both infant and all-age mortality. To do so, we construct a school closure intensity measure for all counties in the United States, combining variation in distance from closures, the historical number of graduates from closing schools, and the timing of closures. Nearby medical school closures, within 300 miles, led to reductions in physicians per capita, even after physician market adjustment through physician migration and postponed retirement. Nurses and midwives also responded to closures, despite not being trained in medical schools. Strikingly, we find that medical school closures led to lower infant and all age mortality rates, suggesting that reducing the supply of poorly trained physicians reduced mortality.