

## 1/3 of Durham's Economy Tied to Health Care

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Advances in the health-care industry nationwide are amplified in Durham, with its economy closely entwined in medical care and research.

In Durham County, the number of health care practitioners -- doctors and other highly skilled professionals -- along with workers in related technical occupations increased 12 percent between 2003 and 2004 to 11,570, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In 2004, the average annual salary for health-care practitioners in Durham was \$54,670, although doctors' salaries averaged almost \$200,000, according to the bureau.

The ranks of support workers in health care, such as home health aides, swelled much more rapidly in the same period -- 48 percent to 3,410, according to the bureau's Occupational Employment and Wages Data. That was a much larger increase than statewide, which posted a 9.2 percent job gain in the sector. The average annual salary for support workers in Durham was \$23,807 in 2004, according to the bureau.

Relatively few job seekers in health care have come through Durham County's Employment Security Commission office in recent years, said Kathy Elliott, the office's director. That's probably an indication that they're able to find a job in the field on their own, she said.

Roughly one-third of Durham's economy is tied to health care or research, says the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce, with three major hospitals, numerous clinics and a host of pharmaceutical and other medical research firms.

"We do, in the labor market, have a disproportionate number of jobs in health care," said Tom White, president of the chamber.

A survey by the now-defunct City of Medicine program a few years ago stated that Durham is home to more than 300 medical and health-related companies with a combined \$1.5 billion in revenue.

The city's 2,300 licensed physicians and interns give it four times the national ratio of doctors to the general population. The city also has double the per capita average of hospital beds with about 2,000.

An aging population is often considered a contributing factor to a growing health care industry.

Census data, however suggest that the age profile in Durham is younger than the nation as a whole and has been decreasing. In the 1990 census, 11.3 percent of the city was age 65 or over. Ten years later, that age group made up 9.3 percent of the population. The national and state averages in 2000 were slightly above 12 percent.

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