

Cancer Specialties are Limited in Rural Areas

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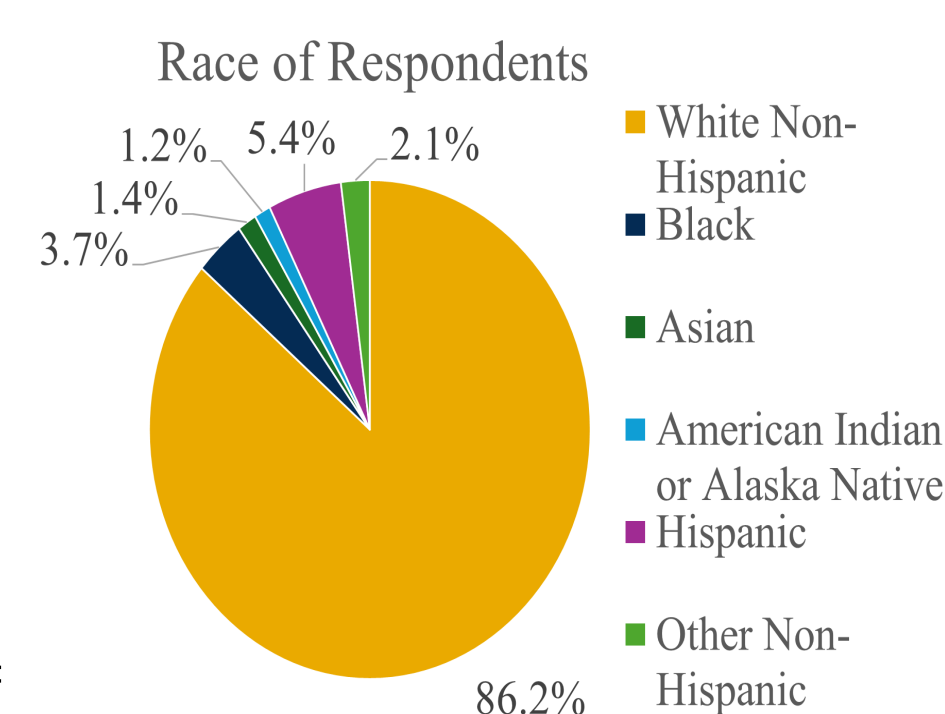


Introduction

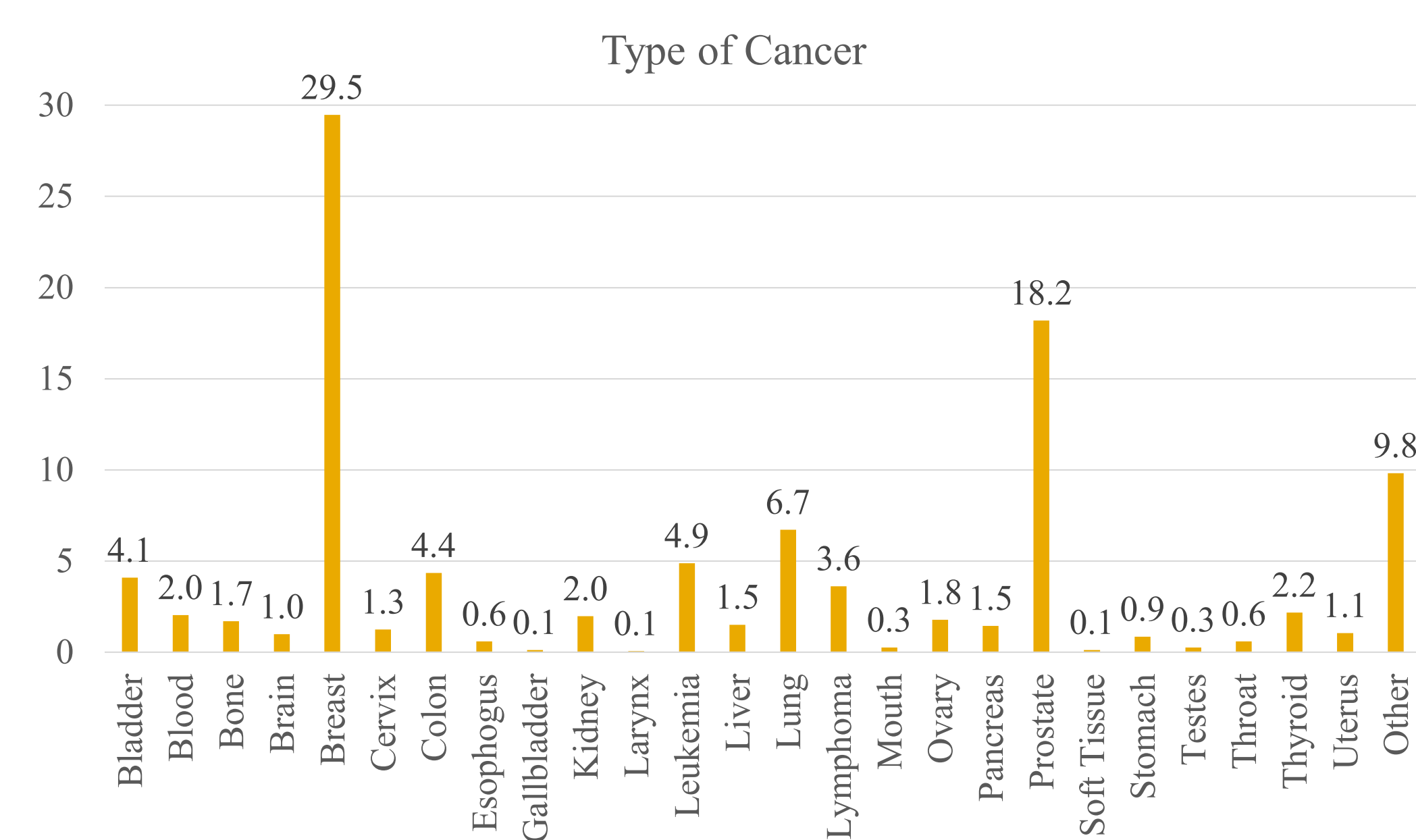
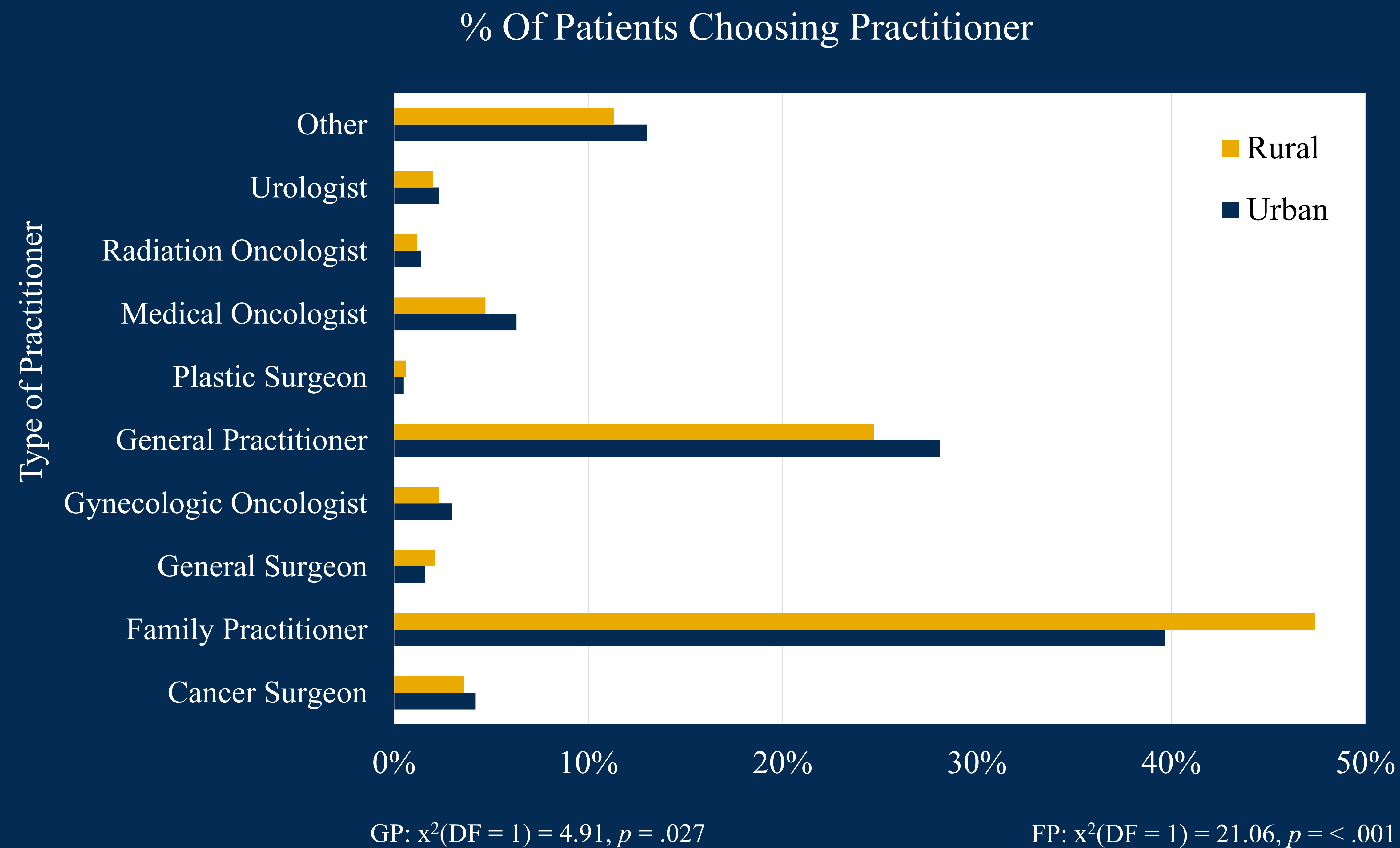
- Census data states that about 21% of the US population lives in rural areas. Despite this, rural physicians only account for 10% of all physicians in the country (*Rural Practice...2014*).
- Due to limited specialist availability, rural family practitioners are more likely to have experience with cancer treatment (Mitchell et al., 2012).
- If rural family practitioners are treating cancer patients more often than their urban counterparts, it may indicate a need for additional training and greater compensation
- We sought to determine the impact that rurality status has on the primary care provider patients choose for their cancer treatment.

Methods and Demographics

- N = 6,688 US adults diagnosed with non-skin cancer and currently receiving treatment for cancer
- Data collected from the 2022 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System
- Compared rurality status to the primary care provider for cancer treatment
- 43.7% of respondents identified as male. Average age was 67.79, SD = 1.95
- 13.6% of respondents were rural



Reliance on Rural Family Practitioners for Cancer Treatment Indicates a Need for Rural Cancer Specialists



Results

- Crosstabulation chi squared test showed rural cancer patients were more likely to visit their family practitioner, $x^2(DF = 1) = 21.06, p < .001$
- Urban patients were more likely to visit their general practitioner, $x^2(DF = 1) = 4.91, p = .027$
- Results for other practitioners were not significant

Discussion

- A family practitioner is one who sees a patient from childhood to adulthood for typical health exams. Conversely, a general practitioner is seen as symptoms arise and typically refers the patient to a specialist (Bishop, 1997).
- Our study showed that rural patients were more likely to visit their family practitioner for cancer treatment than urban patients.
- Previous studies by Amin et al. (2023) and Maganty et al. (2021) showed that rural cancer patients were less likely to see a specialist for their cancer treatment than urban counterparts.
- These data may suggest that rural patients visit their family practitioner for much of their cancer treatment, whereas urban patients visit their general practitioner to be referred to a specialist.
- With the reliance on rural family practitioners, it is more crucial than ever for practitioners to have a wide variety of specialties and knowledge.
- Future research might examine the relations between choice of practitioner and distance from major hospitals
- Also beneficial could be a test of cancer knowledge for rural family practitioners

