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Massive Closure of Pediatric Clinics and Exodus of Pediatricians in Korea

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INTRODUCTION

- **Concerns in Pediatric Healthcare**

Recent issues include pediatric clinic closures and a shortage of pediatricians in the Korean healthcare system.

The decrease in specialist applicants and clinic availability threatens pediatric health.

AIM

- **Research Aim**

To provide evidence for policy proposals by analyzing economic losses, examining the number of clinic closures during the pandemic, and tracking the relocation patterns of pediatric specialists.

METHOD

- **Data**

Health insurance claims data from the Health Insurance Review and Assessment Service (2018-2022).

- **Analysis**

1. Analyze health insurance expenses.
2. Identify pediatric clinic closures during the pandemic.
3. Investigate the occupational status of representatives from closed pediatric clinics as of December 2022.

RESULTS

- **Health Insurance Medical Expenses**

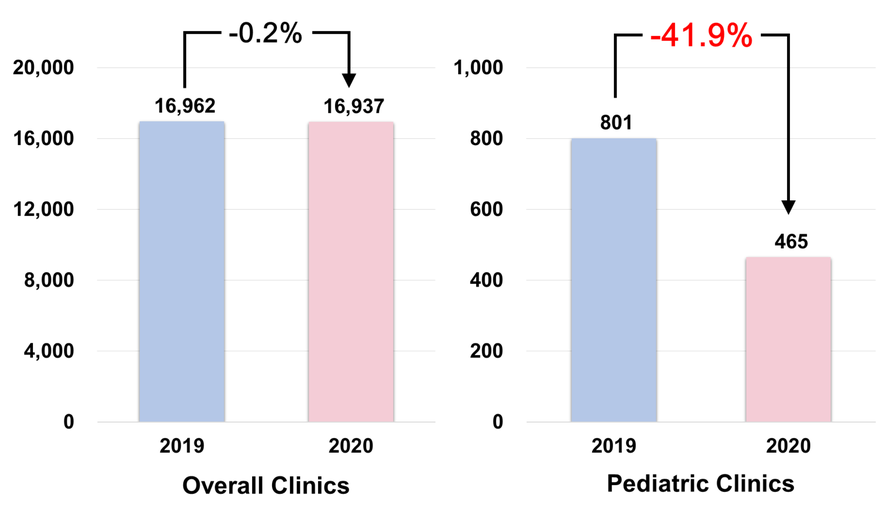
Unit: billion KRW

[Overall Clinics]

(2019) 16,962 → (2020) 16,937

[Pediatric Clinics]

(2019) 801 → (2020) 465



- **Closure of the Pediatric Clinics**

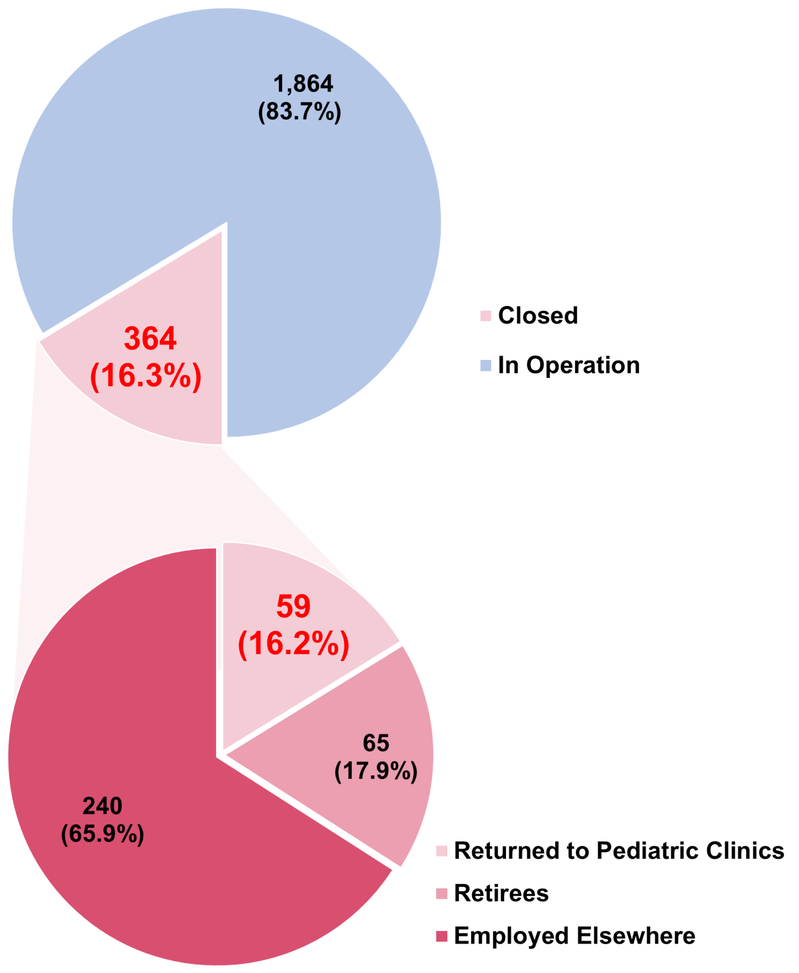
[Dec. 2019]

Total Pediatric Clinics: 2,228

[Dec. 2022]

Operational: 1,864 (83.7%)

Closed: 364 (16.3%)



- **Tracking Pediatricians from Closed Clinics**

Pediatricians from Closed Clinics: 364

Returned to Pediatric Clinics: 59 (16.2%)

Employed Elsewhere: 240 (65.9%)

Retirees: 65 (17.9%)

CONCLUSIONS

- **Crisis in Pediatric Care**

The reduction in pediatricians due to the continued decline in the pediatric population, COVID-19, and systemic inequities in healthcare are threatening primary care and shifting the burden to tertiary care institutions.

Notably, most pediatricians who closed their pediatric clinics chose to retire or pursue alternative medical departments or other hospital types, indicating the challenges of sustaining a viable practice solely within the pediatric domain.

- **Future Directions for Pediatric Care**

In South Korea's healthcare system, anchored in fee-for-service reimbursement, a sharp decline in the number of patients immediately affects doctors' income.

The current system faces challenges in ensuring the sustainability of pediatric clinics while delivering high-quality healthcare to children.

This underscores the imperative to explore various incentive programs or alternative payment systems tailored to pediatrics, a discipline grappling with the impact of declining birth rates.

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