

Understanding Characteristics of Industry Genetic Counselors to Inform Ongoing Workforce Discussions

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BACKGROUND

Shifts within the landscape of genetic counselor (GC) employment are ongoing

- An increasing number of GCs are occupying roles in which they are not seeing patients (“non-clinical”)

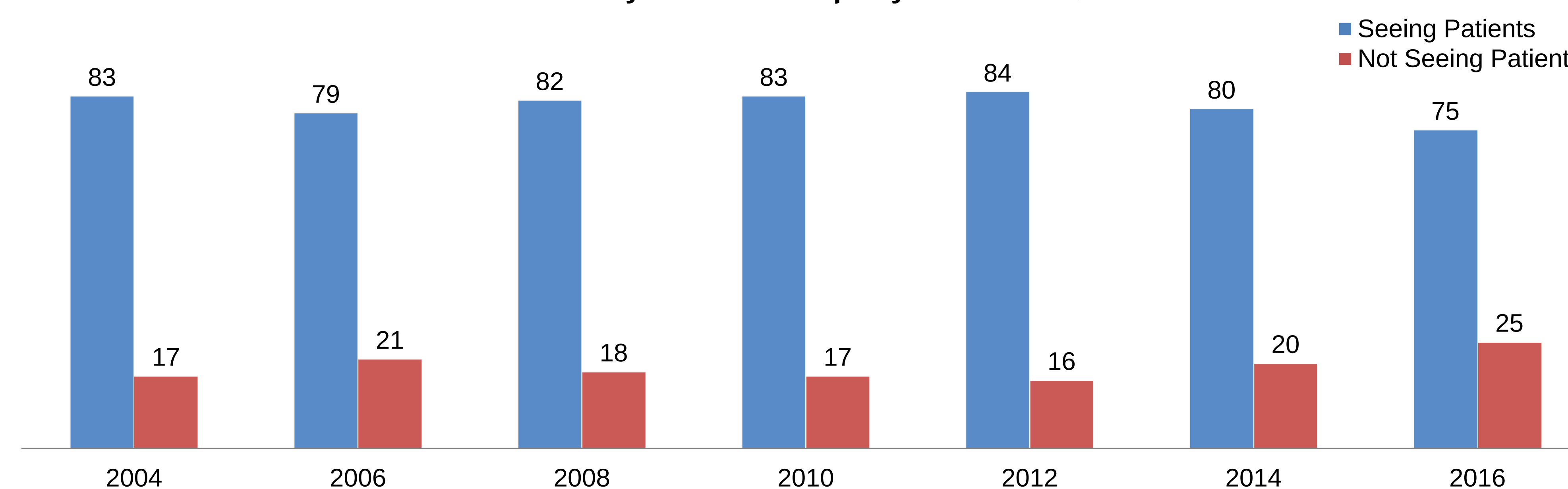
This trend has raised questions about the potential impact on the existing GC workforce

- How to adequately manage both clinical patient volume and supervisory clinical training experiences for GC students during their graduate training

Exploring characteristics of GCs employed in these roles can provide important insights

- How best to adapt to the evolving employment landscape and develop a GC workforce that can continue to meet clinical care and training needs

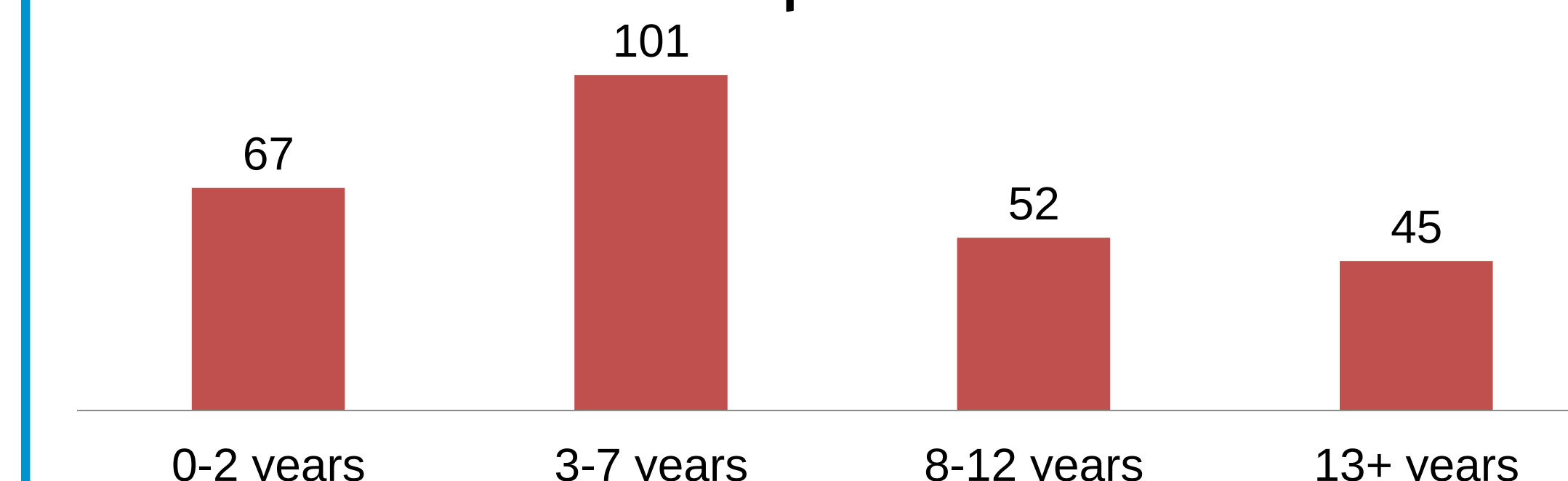
History of GC Employment (%)¹



METHODS

- All GCs employed at 5 commercial diagnostic labs were invited to complete a survey about their GC training, work history, and student supervision experience. Data were compiled and analyzed.
- 353 GCs received the survey and 265 (75%) were returned
- Respondents had on average 7.2 years of prior GC employment experience, with 23% having >10 years (0-36)

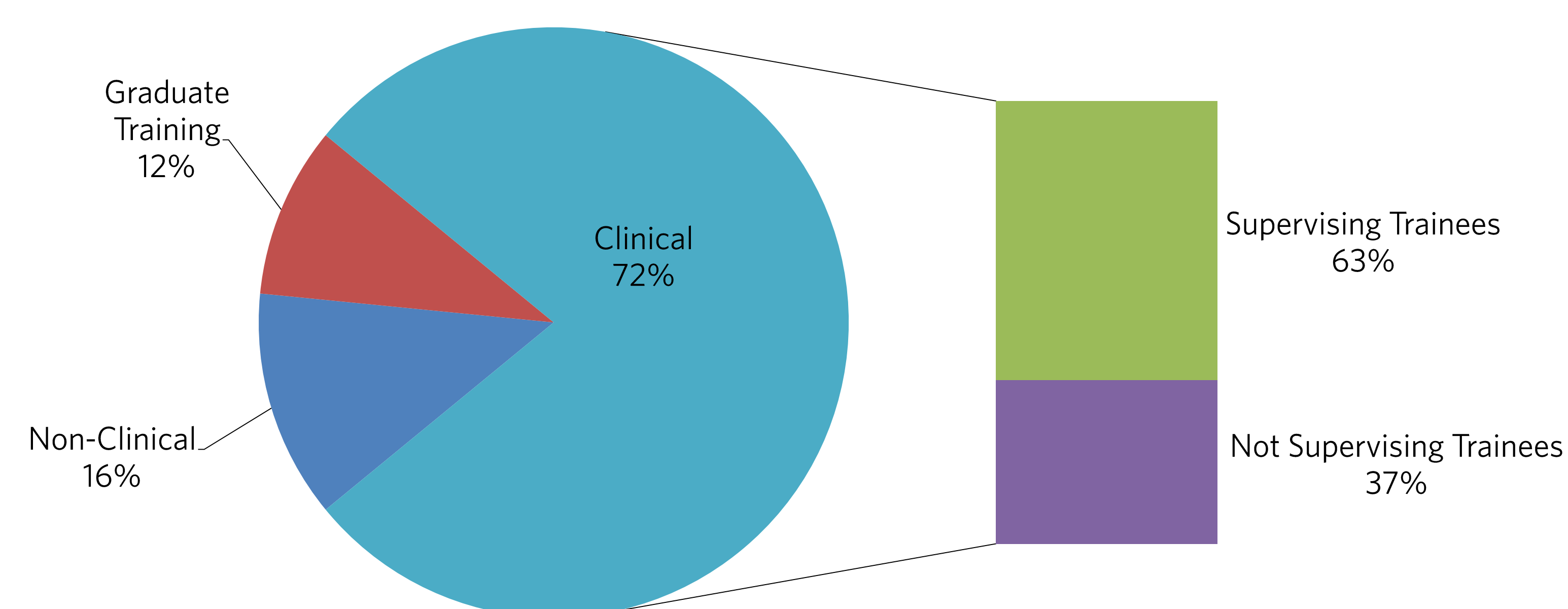
GC Experience



RESULTS

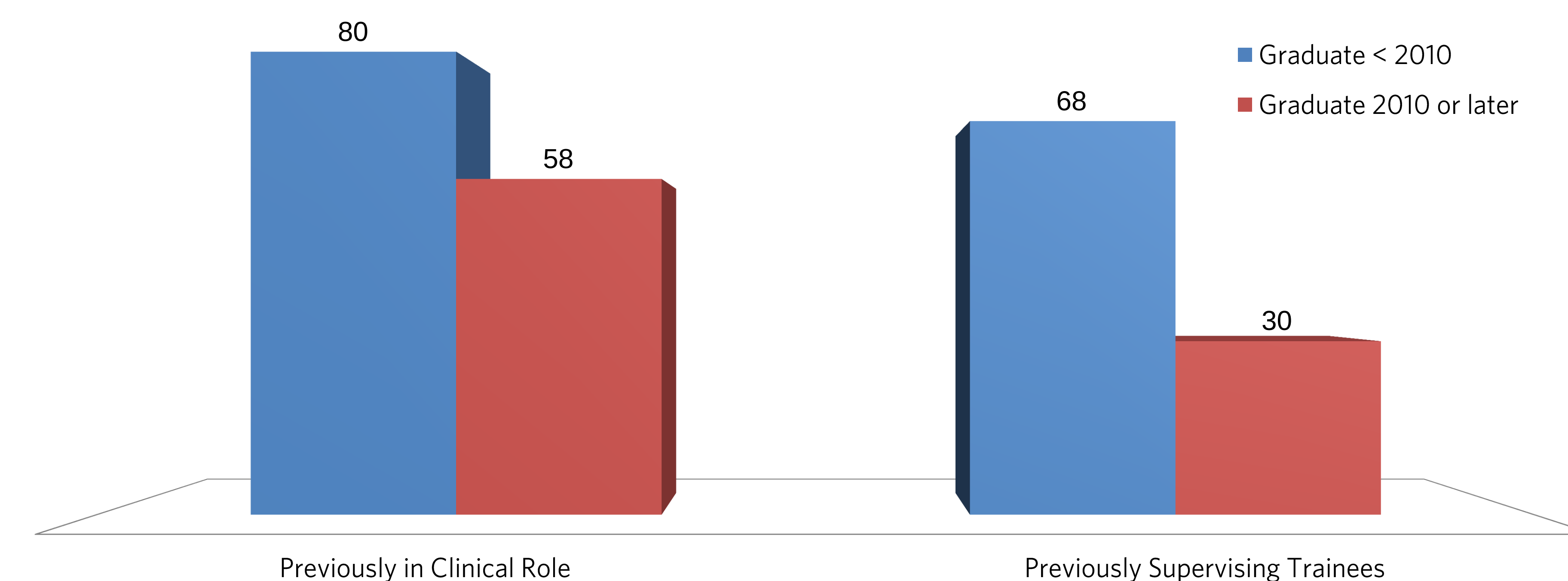
The majority of GCs held a patient-seeing (“clinical”) position immediately prior to coming to work at a laboratory, and more than half of these GCs were supervisors to an average of 3.6 GC students per year each.

Immediate Prior GC Work Setting



Those graduating in 2010 or later were less likely to have come from a clinical role and less likely to be supervising trainees than those graduating prior to 2010.

GCs by Year of Graduation from Training



DISCUSSION

The majority of GCs left a clinical role when coming to the laboratory and 63% were supervising GC students in that role

- Vacancies in clinical care and supervisory training can present challenges for both employers/co-workers and GC training programs
- This becomes particularly difficult when GCs with extensive clinical experience depart

Many fewer recent graduates came to the laboratory from a clinical setting, instead coming directly out of training or from a non-clinical role

- This may reflect the fact that there are more non-clinical jobs available now than in years past
- GCs in current training programs have more exposure to non-clinical roles during their training and may have a more informed desire to take a non-clinical role immediately upon graduating

OPPORTUNITIES

~40% of GCs who were previously in clinical roles were not supervising students

- Develop more clinical training sites by identifying clinical GCs who do not currently supervise any GC students
- Explore beyond formal clinical rotations to access GCs with extensive clinical experience (e.g., GCs in a non-clinical setting who have previous clinical experience)
- Consider alternative models of clinical training for GC students (e.g., rotations with non-clinical GCs who have previous clinical experience)

Employers need to consider how best to both attract and retain GCs, particularly those with extensive experience

- Provide various opportunities to develop new skills, move into leadership, and have a clear path to promotion within the institution
- Partner with GC training programs around recruitment and retention activities (e.g., offering joint faculty appointments)

Clinical GC roles are increasingly available in the commercial sector

- GC training programs will need to adapt curricula to reflect this trend
- GC training programs could explore partnering with commercial laboratories for alternative clinical training rotations

TAKE-HOME POINTS

1. Recent GC graduates may be more likely to take laboratory-based roles directly out of training or from a non-clinical role
2. Monitoring the rate at which clinical roles are being filled will continue to be important to proactively address potential workforce shifts.
3. GC training programs will need to adapt curricula and training experiences to the changing GC workforce
4. GC training programs could partner with clinical GCs working in industry for alternative student clinical rotations; this would also bring supervisory opportunities to those industry GCs

REFERENCES

1. Professional Status Survey (PSS) data, © National Society of Genetic Counselors, 2004-2016. Accessed July 28, 2017.