



EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY, JUNE 27, 2011 AT 5:00 AM EASTERN TIME

Canada's largest physician survey warns of chronic illness impact on the Health Care System

(Ottawa, ON, June 27, 2011) — New data released today from the 2010 National Physician Survey (NPS) shows that, in spite of improvements in some areas, Canada's doctors are finding it increasingly challenging to meet the changing health care needs of the ever growing number of Canadians living with chronic and complex medical conditions.

Of the approximately 12,000 practicing physicians who responded to the 2010 NPS, nearly three-quarters (72%) reported that the complexity of their patient caseload is placing increasing demands on their time. Similarly, nearly two-thirds (63%) said managing patients with chronic conditions was a factor. Other factors that were identified were:

- increasing administrative work and paperwork (61%);
- aging population (59%); and
- increasing patient expectations (58%).

"It's positive to see access to care is improving with increasing numbers of physicians, however the growing demands on physicians' time translates into access concerns that must be addressed." said Dr. Robert Boulay, President of the College of Family Physicians of Canada. "The health care needs of aging baby boomers are being experienced by physicians across the country. We must prepare now for the full impact of this demographic shift while we continue to focus on the health care needs of all other Canadians in the years ahead."

The 2010 NPS data indicates that it takes longer for patients requiring urgent care to see a physician than in 2007:

- 61% of urgent care cases for family physicians are seen within one day; 32% are seen within one day by other specialists. For both groups this is lower than in 2007 when the stats were 65% and 37% respectively.
- For non-urgent care, 26% of physicians can see a patient within a week, but the national average is three weeks for family physicians and 12 weeks for other specialists. The best

non-urgent access is in Saskatchewan and British Columbia where 38% are able to see non-urgent patients within a week. The poorest non-urgent access is in Quebec at 11%.

- 58% of Canadian family physicians and general practitioners are accepting new patients. The easiest provinces in which to be accepted as a new patient are Quebec (66% of practices fully or partially open) and Saskatchewan (64%). Alberta (52%) and PEI (46%) have the lowest proportion of practices willing to accept new patients.
- Physicians continue to work long hours well beyond the standard 40-hour work week. On average a physician's work week was 51.4 hours (comparable to 51.7 hours in 2007), with additional time spent on-call. However, the amount of time spent in direct patient care is decreasing (32.7 hrs/wk in 2010 compared to 33.3 hrs/wk in 2007), while the indirect patient care time requirements are on the rise (6.1 hrs/wk in 2010 compared to 5.9 hrs/wk in 2007). Indirect patient care includes working with charts, paperwork, phone calls, meeting patients' families, and others.

"The NPS findings illustrate clearly that Canada's health care system requires immediate action in two fundamental areas: access to timely care and sustainability of the system," said Dr. Louis Hugo Francescutti, President of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. "By concentrating on the issues in these areas of the health care system, solutions will improve the health of Canadians who use it, reduce burdens on the system, advance quality of service, and address efficiency and effectiveness factors."

Of some concern is the finding that nearly three in ten (29%) physicians indicated that they plan to reduce their hours of clinical work within two years compared to 23% in 2007. 19% report reducing clinical work hours between 2008 and 2010. While only 8% indicated planning to increase clinical hours in 2007, a much higher proportion (38%) reported increasing clinical hours between 2008 and 2010.

The 2010 NPS data also indicates significant changes in physicians' use of electronic media & technology, with nearly four in ten (39%) respondents now having electronic records on a personal computer or laptop, an increase of 13% since 2007. Further, an additional 11% intend to start using electronic records on a computer or a wireless device within two years.

"Canada's physicians are embracing new technologies and tools to tackle the evolving needs of patients as never before," said Dr. Jeff Turnbull, President of the Canadian Medical Association. "The challenge before us all will be to transform our health care system so that it too can evolve to meet patients' needs now and into the future."

The NPS is Canada's largest census survey of physicians and physicians-in-training. It is conducted jointly by The College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC), the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), and The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (Royal College), with a financial contribution from the Canadian Institute for Health Information. The data provide meaningful information on attitudes among the country's present and future doctors toward a wide range of critical issues.

For more information and to see the NPS 2010 data and highlights of the NPS 2010 results, please go to www.nationalphysiciansurvey.ca.

In the months to come, more NPS research will be released related to medical students and residents, as well as specialist physician analysis.

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