

PULSE

Trends in physician supply

The national physician pool is aging but marginally larger than it was 5 years ago. Canadians are also increasingly more likely to be treated by a female physician, while it's more likely a graduate of a Canadian medical school will remain within Canada or eventually return home to hang up a shingle after a stint abroad.

Those are among trends evident in the Canadian Institute for Health Information's latest annual report on the supply, migration and distribution of physicians in Canada (2005).

The CIHI report indicates the number of physicians in Canada grew by 5.3% between 2001 and 2005, (see Table 1), although their average age increased to 48.9 years from 47.6. Female physicians constituted 32.5% of the workforce, as compared to 30.2%.

The national average of physicians per 100 000 population is 190, with Nova Scotia having the most at 218, followed by Quebec 215, Yukon 205, British Columbia 199, Newfoundland & Labrador 193, Alberta 188, Manitoba 179, Ontario 176, New Brunswick 172, Saskatchewan 156, P.E.I. 144 and N.W.T. 103. Nunavut brings up the rear with a scant 46.

The statistics also indicate Ontario is the only jurisdiction in the country with more specialists per capita than family practitioners. In fact, Ontario is only saved by a pair of territories from being the most difficult place in the country to find a family doctor. On average, there are 98 family physicians per 100 000 Canadians, led by Yukon 183, Nova Scotia 118, British Columbia 111, Quebec 109, Alberta 102, New Brunswick 102, Newfoundland & Labrador 99, Manitoba 94, Saskatchewan 89, PEI 89, Ontario 85, N.W.T. 71 and Nunavut 43.

There are 92 specialists per 100 000 Canadians, led by Quebec 106, Nova Scotia 100, Newfoundland & Labrador 94, Ontario 92, British Columbia 88, Alberta 86, Manitoba 86, New Brunswick 70, Saskatchewan 67, P.E.I. 55, N.W.T. 33, Yukon 22, and Nunavut 3.— Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

Table 1: Supply, migration and distribution of Canadian physicians

Variable	2001 n = 58 546	2003 n = 59 454	2005 n = 61 622
No. of physicians	58 546	59 454	61 622
Family medicine	29 627	30 662	31 633
Specialist	28 919	28 792	29 989
No. of physicians per 100 000 population	188	187	190
Family medicine	95	96	98
Specialist	93	91	92
Age, yr, mean			
Family medicine	46.4	47.2	48.0
Specialist	48.9	49.5	49.9
Sex, male			
Family medicine	19 217	19 568	19 693
Specialist	21 658	21 184	21 682
Sex, female			
Family medicine	10 387	11 000	11 698
Specialist	7 260	7 602	8 263
Specialty			
Family medicine	29 627	30 662	31 633
Medical specialist			
Clinical	19 656	19 758	20 653
Laboratory	1 443	1 412	1 436
Surgical specialist	7 769	7 584	7 866
Medical scientist	51	38	34
No. of years since graduation			
< 6	3 354	2 746	2 560
6-10	7 691	7 425	7 447
11-25	26 786	26 873	26 641
26-30	7 374	7 935	8 599
31-35	5 421	6 170	6 805
≥ 36	7 913	8 304	9 456
Canadian medical school graduate			
Family medicine	22 888	23 398	23 988
Specialist	22 130	22 436	23 502
Foreign medical school graduate			
Family medicine	6 622	7 025	7 264
Specialist	6 786	6 353	6 451
Net migration between jurisdictions			
Family medicine	417	380	372
Specialist	496	310	262
Moved abroad			
Family medicine	165	106	87
Specialist	390	189	99
Returned from abroad			
Family medicine	138	100	89
Specialist	196	140	158

Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information.