

New data reflect multiculturalism's impact on medicine

By Patrick Sullivan

Canada's emergence as one of the world's most multicultural nations is being reflected on both sides of the physician-patient relationship, new data from the National Physician Survey (NPS) reveal.

The third release of data from the NPS, the largest survey of its kind ever conducted in Canada, indicates that 18.9% of the country's MDs were trained outside the country, with South Africa alone providing 3% of its doctors. The only other single country with a higher total was the United Kingdom, 5.8%.

The survey, conducted in 2004, attracted 21,296 respondents; 74.2 reported they had trained in Canada, while 6.9% did not indicate where they had trained. The University of Toronto produced the largest proportion of Canadian-trained respondents, 11.9%, followed by the Université de Montréal, 6.8%.

The survey also points to the increasingly cosmopolitan nature of Canadian society. Almost one in five respondents (18.7%) indicated that patients from "cultural minorities" accounted for at least 10% of their practice population; 11.1% said the same statistic applied to recent immigrants.

The survey also provided some fascinating insights into the country's language trends:

- almost one-quarter of Canadian physicians (24.2%) can speak both official languages when treating patients;
- 5.3% of doctors can speak both official languages and at least one additional language;
- 15.1% speak English and an additional language other than French;
- 5.4% speak French and an additional language other than English.

Among the 3,329 respondents who speak a language other than English or French when treating patients, the most common languages are Spanish (17.5%), German (11.5%) and Chinese (9.0%).

Least common are Bosnian, Twi, Ga.

CMA President Dr. Albert Schumacher said the language data contain important messages. "Good communication is crucial on both sides of the health care relationship," he said, "and from the NPS data it is clear that there will be more language-related challenges than ever before."

The NPS was sponsored by the CMA, College of Family Physicians of Canada and Royal College. Its national results are considered accurate within $\pm 0.7\%$, 19 times out of 20.