



Pulse

Slight change in MD:population ratio

Recent data compiled by the Canadian Institute for Health Information indicate that the number of physicians relative to the population has stayed stable over the last few years and

currently stands at 185 per 100 000 population. In 1993 there was 1 physician for every 528 Canadians, compared with 1:541 today.

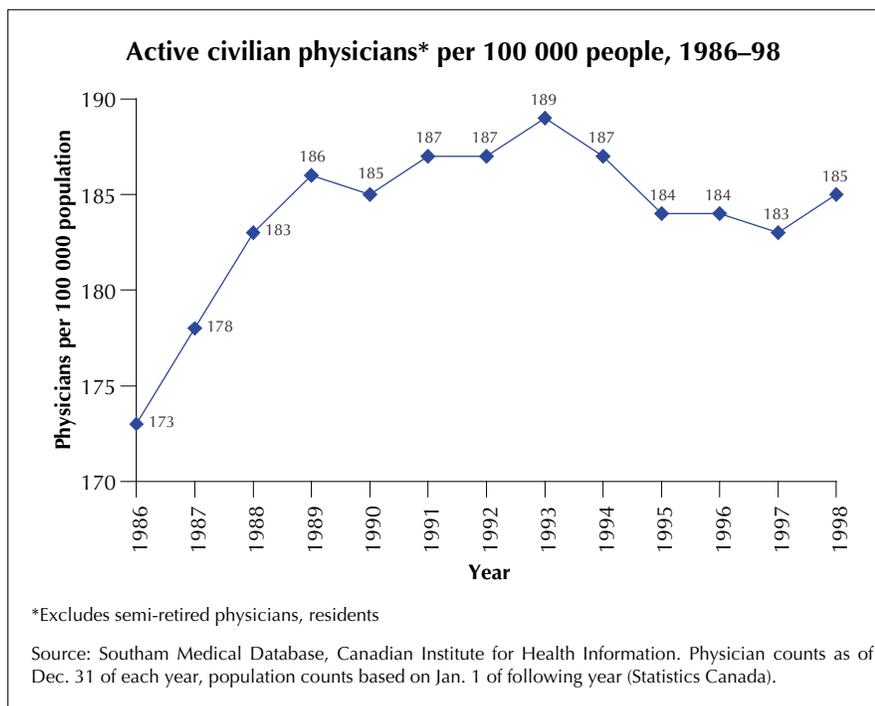
Provinces that exceed the national

rate of physicians per 100 000 population include British Columbia (193), Nova Scotia (196) and Quebec (211). Furthest from the average are Saskatchewan and the Yukon (149) and the Northwest Territories (92).

As of December 1998, there were 56 203 active civilian physicians in Canada. As has been the pattern for many years, the distribution between family physicians (including GPs) and specialists is close to 50:50; the 1998 figures indicate that 51% of doctors are FPs and 49% are specialists.

Female physicians comprise 28% of the practising pool but the numbers are growing steadily. Almost half (47%) of all family physicians under age 40 are female.

Almost one-quarter (24%) of Canada's practising physicians are graduates of foreign medical schools. They comprise 69% of physicians who graduated over 30 years ago but account for only 7% of practising physicians who graduated within the last 10 years. This points to much tougher entry requirements for doctors trained outside Canada. — *Lynda Buske, CMA*



Vancouver company launches new superbug test

A new test for detecting methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) has been launched by Vancouver's I.D. Biomedical Corporation. The company's Velogene Rapid MRSA Identification Assay diagnostic test has already received approval from the US Food and Drug Administration, and approval from Health Canada was expected by the end of August. Marketing to hospitals across North America and Europe began this summer. The test costs \$10 — about the same as current hospital tests — and the company hopes to sell about 5 million annually.

Company president Dr. Tony Holler says the test, which takes about 2 hours to complete, is the first truly rapid test to identify MRSA; normally it takes up to 2 days to get test results. About 4.6 million tests for MRSA are carried out annually in US hospital laboratories. "For hospitals, it's a huge problem," says Holler, who estimates that the market is growing by about 10% a year. If hospitals "can save 1 day through early diagnosis and treatment, that saves \$1000 plus. The speed means that you are treating patients with the right antibiotic quicker, which leads to shorter hospital stays."

The test identifies the gene responsible for methicillin antibiotic resistance approximately 90 minutes after a primary culture is obtained. The company says the test is both fast and accurate. In clinical trials at 4 US hospitals, the test demonstrated 100% accuracy when compared with polymerase chain reaction, the current gold standard in gene-identification technology.

I.D. Biomedical is now preparing for clinical trials for a second diagnostic test to detect vancomycin-resistant enterococci bacteria. — © *Heather Kent, Vancouver*