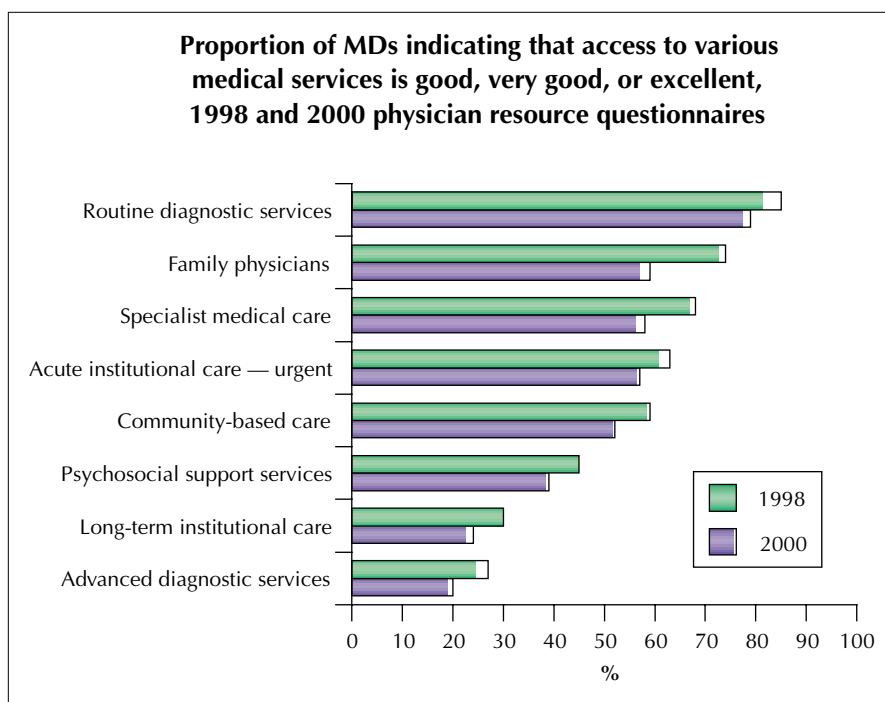


MDs worried about access to care, CMA survey indicates

Access to several medical services remains a problem for some Canadians, results from the CMA's 2000 Physician Resource Questionnaire (PRQ) show. Although 59% of physicians rated access to family physicians in their communities as good, very good or excellent, 35% deemed it fair to poor; 36% also reported that access to specialists is only fair to poor. The PRQ did not ask physicians to rate access to specific specialties, but accompanying comments made by respondents suggest that access to some — such as ophthalmology, orthopedic surgery and psychiatry — is particularly poor.

Physicians seem comfortable with the level of access to routine diagnostic services such as laboratory tests and x-rays, with 79% ranking it as good to excellent and only 14% describing it as fair to poor. However, few physicians think their patients have adequate access to advanced diagnostic tools such as MRIs; only 20% of respondents indicated that availability of these services is good to excellent where they practise. Regional variations were apparent: 69% of physicians in Central Canada consider access fair to poor, compared with 75% in Atlantic Canada and 80% in Western Canada.

The survey also points to problems with the availability of long-term insti-



tutional care. Only 24% of respondents consider it good to excellent, with 64% deeming it fair to poor. One respondent pointed out that a lack of long-term-care beds can have a domino effect: "Long-term-care patients are blocking acute-care beds: dangerous!"

Physicians also appear concerned about psychosocial support services: only 39% indicated that access in their

community is good to excellent, and 52% described it as fair to poor.

The 2000 PRQ was mailed to a random sample of 8000 Canadian physicians; 36.3% responded. Results are considered accurate to within $\pm 1.9\%$, 19 times out of 20. Tables showing the 2000 PRQ results are available online at www.cma.ca/cmaj/vol-163/issue-5/prq. — *Shelley Martin*, martis@cma.ca

An Insider's look at the tobacco industry

The man who inspired the 1999 movie *The Insider* says physicians have a central role to play in the ongoing fight against a savvy tobacco industry. And if they are to battle on equal terms, says Dr. Jeffrey Wigand, they must learn how the tobacco industry operates.

"[Doctors] are a political power and a group that helps influence policy," Wigand told *CMAJ*. "They must hold the tobacco industry accountable."

Wigand, the former head of research for the US tobacco giant Brown & Williamson, is becoming a familiar fixture in Canada. In the spring he addressed the Medical Society of Nova Scotia, and he was recently named a special adviser on smoking issues to federal Health Minister Allan Rock. One of his main responsibilities is to interpret documents unearthed during a series of US lawsuits. He also educates Rock and senior staff about the internal workings of tobacco compa-

nies. Rock says Wigand "gave us the key to some of industry's language and a thread to follow in fully understanding its internal objectives."

In addition to his work in Ottawa, Wigand is collaborating with the BC government to help schools enhance awareness of smoking and the industry that promotes it. He is also helping the BC government relaunch its lawsuit against tobacco companies (see *CMAJ* 2000;162[10]:1468). — *Donalee Moulton*, Halifax