

Smoking rate drops 5% in 5 years

Canadians are butting out in record numbers, with the latest data indicating that fewer than 1 in 4 Canadians now use tobacco.

According to data from the Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey, 23% of Canadians — 5.7 million people aged 15 and older — were smoking in the first half of 2001, compared with 24% in 2000. This is the lowest rate since tracking began 36 years ago. In 1965, half of Canadians smoked.

“It’s not just [the] 1% [decrease],” says Cynthia Callard, executive director of Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada (www.smoke-free.ca). “There has been consistent progress.”

Smoking rates stalled at 30% for almost a decade after tobacco taxes decreased and advertising increased. Now,

says Callard, higher taxes, smoking bans in public places, new packaging and tougher advertising laws are having a “quick impact on smoking rates, which will affect disease rates.”

Another positive sign is that smokers are smoking less. Daily smokers had about 16 cigarettes a day in 2001, down from 21 in 1981. Men older than 25 smoked the most (18 per day); women 15 to 24 smoked least (11.7 per day).

Callard is heartened by these successes. “In public health you rarely see such good results over a few years. We’ve had a 5% drop over 5 years — over a million people have quit.”

The survey of 10 700 Canadians indicated that the 20-to-24 age group had the highest proportion of smokers, 34%. Callard says this young-adult group has

traditionally had the highest rate of smoking, with its members often lacking the help they need to quit. “They’re a real challenge,” she adds. “They should be one of our top priorities.”

Twenty-three percent of teenagers aged 15 to 19 smoked (26% of women and 20% of men). The good news is that about a quarter of these teens tried to quit during the first half of the year, the highest proportion among all age groups.

Across Canada, 25% of men smoked, compared with 21% of women. The lowest prevalence rate was in British Columbia, where about 17% of those aged 15 and over are smokers. Manitoba and Prince Edward Island, both at 28%, were the provinces with the highest smoking rates. — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*

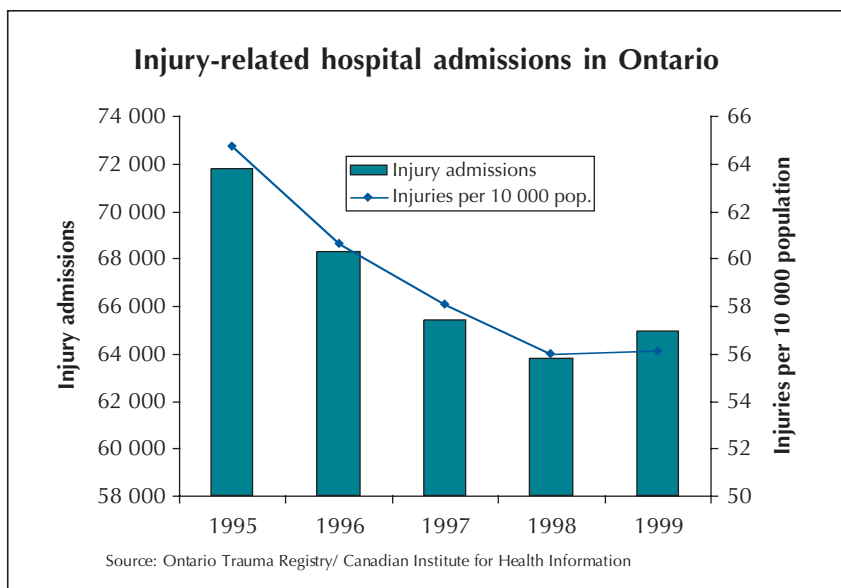
PULSE

Number of injury-related hospitalizations drops

The number of injury-related hospital admissions in Ontario declined by 10% during the latter half of the 1990s, dropping from more than 70 000 in 1995 to fewer than 65 000 in 1999. Despite the decrease, the 1999 figures still equate to 175 hospitalizations a day in Ontario. The data, from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, exclude injuries that were treated in emergency rooms, as well as patients who did not survive long enough to be hospitalized.

The average age of patients admitted due to an injury increased from 50 to 53 between 1995 and 1999, but the average length of stay for these patients remained stable at about 9 days. In 1999, patients 65 and older accounted for 43% of all injury-related admissions. The Toronto region, with 456 injuries per 100 000 people, had the lowest rate in the province.

The majority of injury-related hospitalizations are caused by falls (59%), followed by motor vehicle collisions (13%). Assault-related injuries comprised only 3% of the total, and de-



clined by 23% between 1995 and 1999. Eighty percent of the assault-related injuries involved men, 65% of whom were under age 35.

July is the most common month for injury-related admissions, although De-

cember is the month in which the greatest proportion of such admissions result in an in-hospital death. The most common time for an injury-related hospital admission is 9 pm. — *Lynda Buske, Associate Director of Research, CMA*