



Surging computer use by MDs

More than one-third of Canadian physicians (41%) now use the Internet and of those who do 1 in 4 (23%) is logging on to the World Wide Web daily and almost half (46%) are using e-mail every day. The data, compiled from the CMA's 1997 Physician Resource Questionnaire (PRQ), are the first detailed statistics dealing with the use of computers and the Internet by Canadian doctors. The PRQ was mailed in January and by mid-April 3400 completed forms had been returned, for a response rate of 45%.

"The numbers indicate the CMA made the right move when it became the world's first national medical association to provide an Internet-based information service in 1995," said Stephen Prudhomme, the director of professional development. "I'm impressed that more than 40% of doctors are now using the Internet and that 39% of those who don't use it say they expect to within the next year. We've been witnessing the growth with *CMA Online* [www.cma.ca]."

CMA's online service

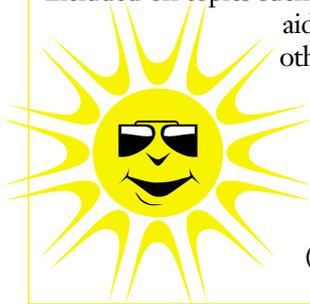
More than one-quarter (26%) of respondents who reported using the Internet now log on to *CMA Online* at least once a month, with 1% doing it daily. The CMA's online service is now averaging well over 100 000 Web page accesses a month — there were 27 104 in the week ending May 31, 1997. The most popular products within *CMA Online* are consistently the page featuring MD Management Ltd. fund values, which are updated every weekday, and the *CMAJ* home page.

The survey also indicated that

Cool site

www.theberries.ns.ca

Just the Berries is a Continuing Medical Education site targeted to busy family physicians. It provides "berries" or "pearls" of topical information to physicians in a concise and useful format. The site has a clean and simple design that allows users to find information quickly and efficiently. Current and archival articles are posted, along with a Berry of the Week and clinical Berry Quiz. In addition to information for physicians, excellent Patient Berries are included on topics such as contraception, stroke prevention, obesity and first aid. The material is complemented by a detailed list of other Web and print resources, including an extensive



list of peer-reviewed Web sites that deal with common medical problems. Just the Berries is an electronic spin-off from a newsletter published by St. Martha's Regional Hospital. The initiative is coordinated by Dr. John Hickey of Antigonish, NS (jhickey@fox.nstn.ca). — *Caroline Robertson*

16% of physicians who use the Internet participate in discussion groups either daily or weekly and an impressive 72% use it for bibliographic database searching of services such as MEDLINE at least monthly.

One interesting fact is that only three-quarters (74%) of physicians personally use a computer, although one-third (32%) of those who do not intend to start within the next year. Dr. John Hoey, *CMAJ*'s editor-in-chief, said not to put much stock in the former number.

"Our medical schools are producing 1500 or 1600 new doctors every year, and they will enter practice having been taught that the computer is a key ally. I think the future points to steady growth for *CMA Online* because this new generation of doctors is going to be very comfortable going wherever the Internet will take them."

Warren Lampitt of Timmins, Ont., the information systems manager at Gretmar Communications, wasn't surprised by the CMA data. "About 9 months ago we conducted a survey that

showed fewer than 10% of physicians were online in our region. Nine months later, that number had hit 40%.

"Even though they are online, however, the bulk of these physicians are still fairly new users with little experience and they frequently encounter problems trying to conduct relatively simple tasks. I think this means that *CMA Online* will have a continuing responsibility to help ease physicians into this brave new world." — *Patrick Sullivan*

Highlights from *CMA Online*

The 130th annual meeting of the CMA will be held in Victoria Aug. 17–20. Major issues to be debated include the future of Canada's health care system, the GST, physician unity and smoking. Members will be able to keep up to date as these General Council debates take place through daily updates posted on *CMA Online* (www.cma.ca/canmed/am130 [English] and www.cma.ca/canmed/am130/index_f.htm [French]).