



Pulse

Health care spending: Sunnier days ahead?

Based on November estimates from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, spending on health care reached \$77.1 billion in 1997 and \$80 billion in 1998. Spending within the public sector increased by 3.7%, a dramatic increase over the previous 4 years when these increases averaged only 0.7% a year.

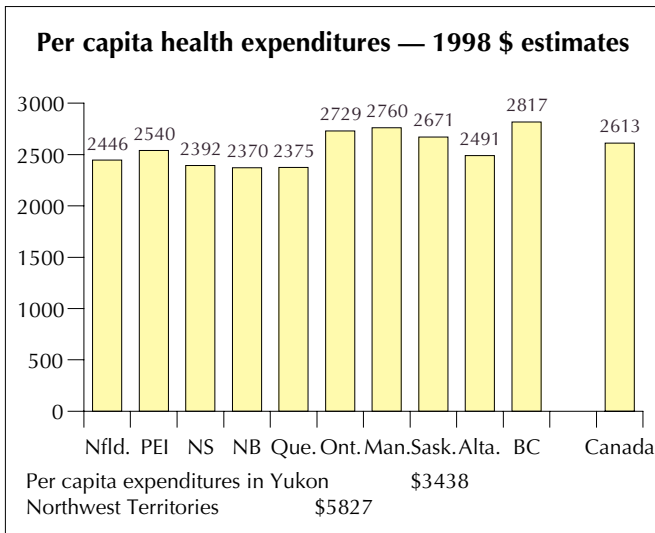
The private sector — this includes private insurance

and out-of-pocket costs — continues to grow in importance, accounting for an estimated 30.3% of total health care spending in 1998, or \$792 per capita. The private sector accounts for only 1.2% of total spending on physician services but for more than 90% of spending on “other professionals” and for over 68% of all drug expenditures.

The 1998 estimates indicate that the largest annual percentage increase in per capita spending occurred in Newfoundland (4.9%), while Prince Edward Island experienced a decrease of 0.7%. Alberta continues to spend the least on health care as a percentage of provincial GDP — 7% in 1998. Newfoundland spends the most, 12.3%.

Spending increased in all categories except capital expenditures, an area that has recorded decreases for the last 4 years. A downward trend in hospital spending that began in 1994 appears to have ended, with a 0.4% increase in spending in 1997 and an estimated jump of 3% in 1998. Spending on nonphysician professionals showed the largest increase in 1997 (5.1%) while spending on drugs experienced the biggest increase in 1998 (5.9%).

This column was written by Lynda Buske, chief, physician resources information planning, CMA. Readers may send potential research topics to Patrick Sullivan (sullip@cma.ca; 613 731-8610 or 800 663-7336, x2126; fax 613 523-0937).



Briefly . . .

Baby boomers and arthritis rates

Toronto — The number of Canadians diagnosed with arthritis will increase from 2.9 million to 6.5 million, or by 124%, between 1991 and 2031, a new study indicates. The research, done for the Arthritis Society by Drs. Elizabeth Badley and Peter Wang of the Toronto Hospital, reveals that baby boomers will be hardest hit: about half the increase will be among those aged 45 years and older. The society is calling for a nation-wide strategy to cope with the increased incidence. The number of Canadians with an arthritis-related disability is projected to grow from 572 000 in 1991 to 1.12

million by 2031. In 1990, more than 450 000 Canadian with arthritis consulted a health professional about their condition; doctors were consulted 88% of the time.

Not kid stuff

Ottawa — Health Canada advises that soft vinyl (PVC) teethingers and rattles should be discarded because of a potential health risk. The products contain a phthalate plasticizer called DINP, which is used to make the vinyl soft. Laboratory tests on animals indicate that intense exposure to DINP can cause potential damage to the kidneys and liver. More information is available at the Health Canada Web site, www.hc-sc.gc.ca/advisory, or by phoning 888 774-1111.

Strange injuries

Kenya — A 21-year-old farmer was badly injured when he tried to milk a grazing wild elephant near Africa’s Lake Nakuru. After creeping up to the beast, the man managed to pull about half a litre of milk before the animal realized it wasn’t her calf suckling. She tossed him into the air and pursued him as he scrambled up a nearby tree. She then uprooted the tree with her trunk and waved it in the air. A group of screaming women distracted the elephant, allowing the man to escape. He was taken to hospital with fractured ribs and a dislocated shoulder. His reasons for trying to milk the elephant were not disclosed. — Submitted by *Dr. Garth Dickinson, Zimbabwe*