

Pulse

Patients appear to be patient, survey finds

PriceWaterhouseCoopers recently asked a representative sample of Canadians how long they had waited to see a doctor or to have a medical procedure performed. Waiting times were shortest for appointments with general practitioners

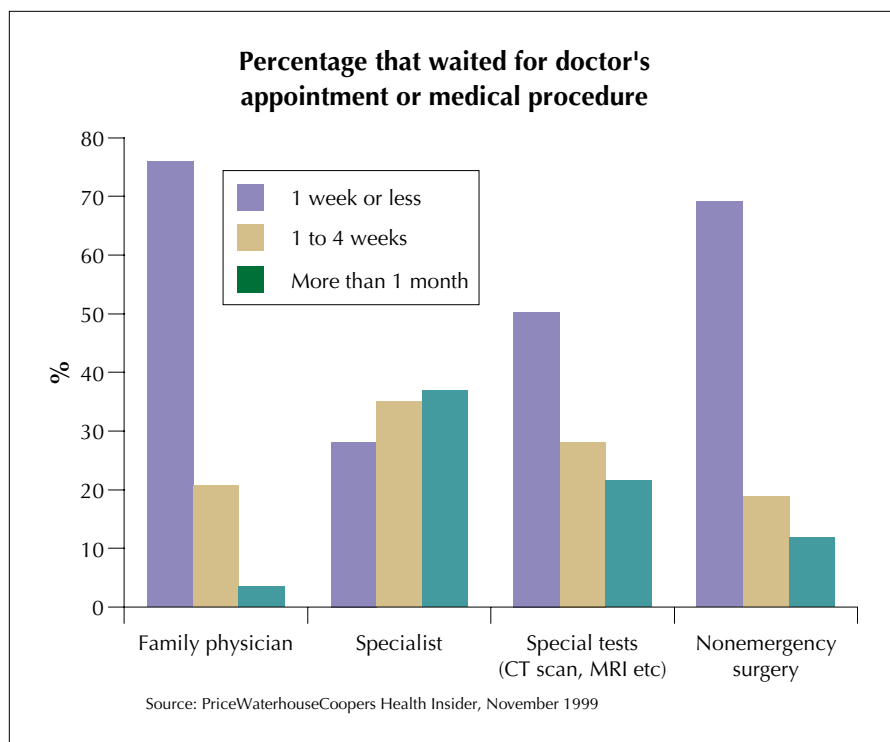
and family physicians, with most respondents (75.9%) waiting a week or less, and only 3.5% waiting longer than a month. Waiting times were also fairly short for nonemergency surgery or other surgical procedures, with 69.2% of respondents

waiting no longer than a week, and only 11.9% waiting more than a month.

Among those who had special medical tests, 50.3% waited a week or less and 21.6% waited longer than a month. Waiting times were longest for appointments with specialists, with only 28.1% of respondents waiting a week or less, while more than one-third (36.9%) waited more than a month.

Although more than half of the respondents (52.3%) said waiting times for medical services are longer compared with 5 years ago, the majority (90.3%) stated current waiting times for GP/FPs are acceptable. Most of the respondents also said that longer waiting times to see specialists and for special medical tests (such as CT or MRI scans) were acceptable (83% and 86%).

One-quarter (25.1%) identified access to specialists as the medical service most in need of shorter waiting times, while 18.4% said waiting times for special medical tests could make that claim. Only 9.9% said they needed quicker access to GP/FPs. The survey was released in October and involved medical contacts made by patients in the previous year. — *Shelley Martin, CMA, martis@cma.ca*



Access to effective TB treatment a human right, countries declare

Multidrug-resistant strains of tuberculosis have already cost cities like New York and countries like Russia hundreds of lives and more than \$1 billion each, and these strains will continue to emerge unless countries act quickly to strengthen their control over the disease, the World Health Organization says.

A new report from WHO and the International Union against TB and Lung Disease indicates that resistance to at least 1 TB drug has increased by

50% in both Denmark and Germany since 1996, and doubled in New Zealand. In all 3 countries, foreign-born TB patients are nearly twice as likely as native-born patients to be harbouring a drug-resistant strain.

“Improved screening of immigrants will not solve this problem,” said Dr. Arata Kochi, director of the Stop TB Initiative. “The only safeguard for wealthy countries is to help countries with poorly functioning TB-control programs to fix the problem

immediately by helping them strengthen their programs.”

To this end, 20 countries attending the Ministerial Conference on TB and Sustainable Development, held in Amsterdam Mar. 24, declared that global access to effective TB treatment is a human right and a government’s responsibility. This means that countries must provide anti-TB drugs, unhindered access to TB treatment, effective means of delivering treatment and affordable medicine for peo-