

## Pulse

# Doctors working harder, earning less

Census data from Statistics Canada indicate that average physician net earnings before income taxes fell between the 1981 and 1996 censuses.

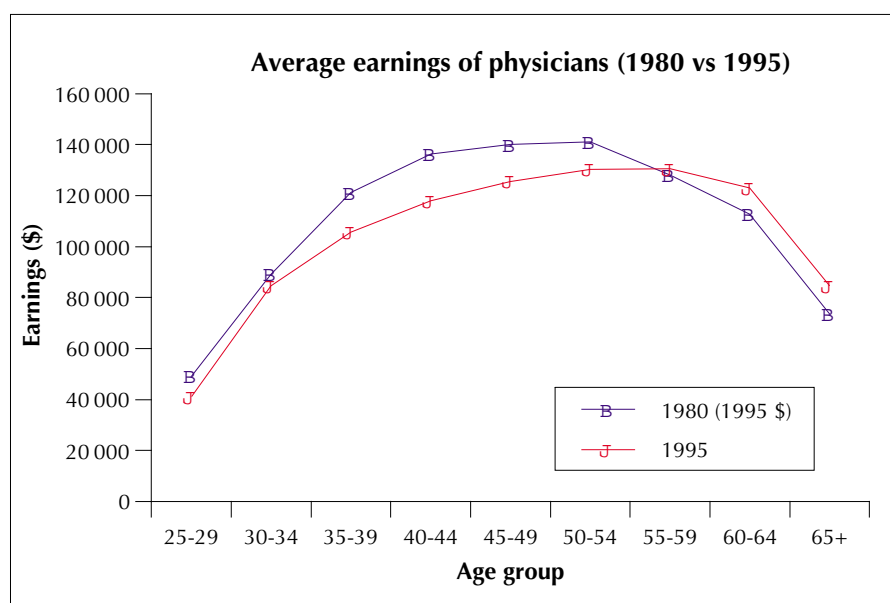
The study of census data, conducted by the Income Statistics Division of Statistics Canada, reveals that the average net earnings of physicians decreased

from \$107 500 in 1980 (adjusted to 1995 dollars) to \$105 200 in 1995. Interestingly, earnings fell for all age groups among physicians under age 55 but increased for those who were 55 or older. For example, physicians in the 60-64 age group saw a 9% increase in average earnings. Given that a majority of physi-

cians are paid on a fee-for-service basis, this may imply that older physicians were working harder and were providing more services in 1995 than in 1980.

The study also compared the average net earnings of male and female physicians. In 1995 the average male physician had net earnings of \$117 200, while the average female physician earned \$76 000, or 64.8% of what her male colleagues earned. After standardizing for age and full-time/part-time practice, female physicians earned 73.3% as much as males.

Specialists had average net earnings of \$116 500 in 1995, compared with \$98 700 for general practitioners and family physicians. Male specialists earned, on average, 20% more than male GP/FPs, while the average earnings of female specialists exceeded those of their primary care colleagues by only 7%. — *Lynda Buske*, Chief, Physician Resources Information Planning, CMA.



Readers may send potential research topics to Patrick Sullivan (sullip@cma.ca; 800 663-7336, x2126; fax 613 565-2382).

## New Ontario panel to look at physician shortage

Finding a solution to Ontario's doctor shortage won't be easy, but Peter George, president of McMaster University in Hamilton, is committed to studying every avenue that could lead to an easing of the problem. "I wouldn't have taken the job if I didn't think the province was serious," George told *CMAJ*. "This is volunteer work for me. I think it's extremely important for the delivery of health care in the province."

He was assigned to head a panel to study the problem after the Ministry of Health concluded in January that Ontario could be short as many as 1000 doctors. "As long as there are

communities without health care the situation is serious," George commented. But he doesn't believe the solution is as simple as increasing the number of graduates from provincial medical schools. The equation is complicated by doctors trained outside Ontario, the substitution of services from other professionals such as nurse practitioners for physicians' services, and Canadians going to the US for residency programs and not returning home. All these aspects of the problem will be studied by the panel.

George is also concerned about the aging of the medical profession and

wonders if Ontario will "run into retirement bulges that exacerbate the shortages."

The panel's first step will be to discuss the terms of reference and put a work plan together. "We've got a limited amount of time and there must be some priorities within that list."

George says that although some small communities, particularly in Northern Ontario, have been hard hit by the doctor shortage, there are some shortages in large cities as well. He expects the panel will complete its report by the end of June. — *Ken Kilpatrick*, Hamilton