

Are the Troubles the source of Northern Ireland's heavy prescribing?

Residents of Northern Ireland take 75% more tranquilizers and sedatives and 37% more antidepressants than other Britons, a study prepared for a British mental health charity indicates.

Author Raman Kapur says the region's overall mental health needs are 25% greater than in the rest of the country. He blames the disparity on the Troubles — the decades of sectarian violence. Despite ongoing peace talks, he says a war psychology has persisted and people remain reluctant to talk about their fears. He says a slogan from the 1970s, "loose talk costs lives," still holds sway in the region. "The truth," he told the BBC, "is that loose talk heals minds."

Although community groups work to help those traumatized by violence, their funding and scope is uneven. In May the head of Northern Ireland's Mental

Health Commission, Francis Walsh, said the commission's annual budget, Can\$1 million, was "a joke."

But the region's problems are not limited to mental health issues, because Northern Ireland's health care professionals continue to be targets of violence. In August staff at the Ulster, Royal Victoria and Mater hospitals in Belfast received death threats from loyalist and republican paramilitary groups. The Catholic Reaction Force warned it would kill 6 workers, 3 at the Royal Victoria and 3 at the Mater, whom it accused of having links with British security forces. The Red Hand Defenders then threatened to kill Catholics at the Mater and Ulster hospitals if this happened. Hospital staff held a 1-hour work stoppage Aug. 6 to protest the threats, and the BMA issued a statement con-



Throughout Northern Ireland, a war psychology has persisted

demning the threats and urging their retraction. One survey determined that 500 threats were made against hospital staff in 2000. — *Mary Helen Spooner*, West Sussex, UK

PULSE

"Go south, young MD" message being heard again

The Canadian Institute for Health Information says that more than 600 physicians left Canada in 2001, a 45% increase over the previous year (see related article, page 679). This figure, combined with the fact that only 334

physicians returned here, means that Canada suffered a net loss of 275 physicians in 2001. This represents a 68% increase over 2000 and the largest net loss since 1997, when it stood at 431 doctors. Most of the physicians

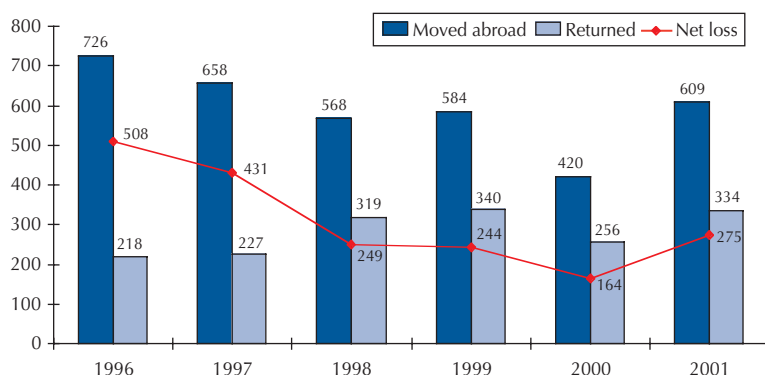
moving abroad (72%) were specialists; of those, 64% had graduated from medical school 15 years ago or less.

The number of active physicians in Canada increased again in 2001, to 58 546, and the number of physicians per 100 000 population improved slightly, from 187 per 100 000 in 2000 to 188 per 100 000 in 2001. This is the highest ratio since 1995 but is still below the 1993 peak of 191 per 100 000.

The physician total is split evenly between specialists (49%) and family physicians (51%). Women continue to represent an increasingly larger share of the pool of practising doctors (30%); among family physicians, women account for 35% of the workforce.

The average age of physicians continues to rise, with specialists averaging 48.8 years, family physicians 46.4. Fifteen percent (9200) of the country's practising physicians are aged 60 or older. — *Lynda Buske*, Associate Director of Research, CMA

Migration of Canadian physicians



Source: CIHI, Supply, Distribution and Migration of Canadian Physicians, 2001