MediData: the growing physician workforce

The number of physicians in Canada increased from 68 101 in 2009 to 77 674 in 2013, outpacing population growth by a factor of three, according to a new report from the Canadian Institute for Health Information. There is a fairly even split between family doctors (39 392) and specialists (38 282). For every 100 000 Canadians in 2013, there were 220 physicians. To put this into perspective, there were 280 doctors per 100 000 residents in the United Kingdom in 2012, and 250 per 100 000 in the United States the year before, according to the World Health Organization.

Percentage-wise, Saskatchewan had the most new physicians (351), an increase of 20.6%. That province's population has increased by more than 100 000 in the past six years and is historically underserved. All provinces experienced double-digit growth except British Columbia, where the number of doctors increased by only 8.6%. The territories, which have few physicians, saw either no growth or negative growth.

Though total payments to physicians again increased, by 3.5% in 2012–13 to \$22.8 billion, the increase was the lowest in a decade. On average, physicians grossed the most annually in Ontario (\$370 731) and the least in Nova Scotia (\$261 422). The average gross clinical payment across Canada increased by less than \$1000 in 2011–12 over the previous year.

Other highlights from the report:

- The number of female physicians increased by 22.5% between 2009 and 2013, while the number of the male physicians increased by only 9.2%.
- Female doctors account for 43.1% of family physicians and 33.2% of specialists.
- Overall fee-for-service payments in 2012–13 came to \$14.6 billion, with an average fee for service of \$43.35 for family doctors and \$77.69 for specialists. — Roger Collier, *CMAJ*