

## PULSE

## Nfld., Sask. retain smallest proportion of postgraduate trainees

A longitudinal study reported recently in the *ACMC* (Association of Canadian Medical Colleges) *Forum* shows that while an overwhelming majority of newly qualified physicians stay in Canada for the first 2 years after leaving postgraduate training, the passage of time slowly erodes the number who remain.

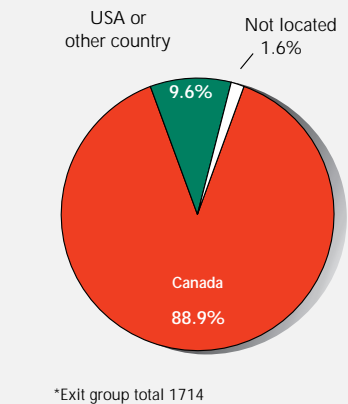
The study examined the movement, both interprovincial and international, of the 1989 postgraduate training exit cohort. The exit group consisted of 1714 graduates of Canadian medical schools who completed their residency training in Canada. Analyses were conducted at 2, 5 and 10 years following graduation.

Two years after graduation, 1605 physicians (93.6%) remained in Canada, while 100 (5.9%) had relocated to the US or elsewhere and 9 physicians could not be located. At 5 years after graduation, 25 physicians had returned to

Canada from the US but 50 more had headed south, or elsewhere, and 12 could not be found; 1577 (92%) remained in Canada. By 10 years after graduation, 1523 physicians in the cohort (88.9%) remained in Canada; although 18 had returned from the US, an additional 57 had relocated to the US or elsewhere, and 27 could not be located.

All provinces experienced both immigration and out-migration over the 10 years of the study; BC had both the highest retention rate for its own postgraduate trainees (79%) and the highest recruitment rate (84%). The recruitment rate means that for every 100 physicians receiving postgraduate training in BC, 84 additional doctors who had received postgraduate training elsewhere in Canada moved to the province. Although Quebec's retention rate was relatively high (77%), it had the lowest recruitment rate (9%).

Practice location of the 1989 cohort of postgraduate trainees 10 years after exit from training



Newfoundland had low retention (21%) and recruitment (17%) rates, as did Saskatchewan (23% for both). — *Shelley Martin, martis@cma.ca*

## One-quarter of South African adults now HIV positive

Although 1 in 9 South Africans, including 1 in 4 adults, is now infected with HIV, South Africa's health minister says there has been a "flattening of the curve over 3 years" and this "begins to suggest that the prevalence of HIV in the population may be stabilizing." Dr. Manto Tshabalala-Msimang made the comment during a Mar. 20 press conference as her government released its annual AIDS report. The government estimates that 4.7 million South Africans are now infected with HIV, an increase of 500 000 people in the past year. In 2000 the main increase was in women in their 20s, who appear to be ignoring a advertising campaign promoting abstinence and the use of condoms.

Health Canada estimates that 50 000 Canadians have been infected with HIV, with about 4200 new cases being reported annually. — *CMAJ*

## US physicians shunning online communication with patients

Despite growing public demand, only 20% of American physicians connect with patients online, and half of those who don't connect say they have no intention of doing so. These are the findings of *Taking the pulse: physicians and the Internet*, a survey of 1200 primary care physicians and specialists.

Doctors who do email patients said they believe it strengthens their relationship and is more efficient than other means of communication. However, 80% of those who don't consult with patients this way believe electronic communication "dilutes and minimizes" the physician-patient relationship and say they prefer face-to-face interaction.

Results from the nationally representative sample of physicians, conducted by phone in June and July 2000, indicate a prevailing attitude that the Internet is not critical to medical practice.

"There are 2 solitudes here [physicians and patients] and they aren't com-

municating," says Hy Eliasoph of Deloitte & Touche, the consulting firm that conducted the survey.

Many doctors are "Web resistant" in various ways. Those who refuse to link with patients in cyberspace cite concerns about receiving too much email (60%), professional liability (50%) and not being reimbursed for their time (40%). "Most physicians believe that email is an alternative to — not a supplement to — face-to-face visits," says Eliasoph. "This is not the case."

The survey found that even though 59% of respondents think that the Internet will "radically improve communication among patients, providers and payers," only 21% agree that it is essential to their practice today. This attitude appears to be reflected in the battering that health-based dot.com companies have taken in the stock market in the past year. — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*