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Canada's future physicians make choices to ensure personal –professional life balance

Health care system will need to accommodate changing expectations

(Ottawa, Ont., September 28, 2011) — Data released today from the medical student and resident component of the 2010 National Physician Survey (NPS) shows Canada's future physicians want to work smarter to meet the growing and increasingly complex health care needs of Canadians.

Of the nearly 5,600 medical students and residents who responded to the 2010 NPS, 53% identified a balance between personal and professional life as the most important factor for a satisfying practice. Although lower than the 2007 NPS response, the same issue also topped the list three years ago.

“With a focus on limiting duty hours, medical students and residents are well aware of how overwork may impact patient safety as well as their personal health and wellness,” said Dr. Louis Hugo Francescutti, President of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. “They have repeatedly indicated their preference for delivering health care in a way that does not negatively impact their professional and personal lives. Our health care system must find a solution to accommodate these changing expectations, and in fact, would likely benefit overall.”

“The Patient's Medical Home is a model for patient-centered care by family physicians and other health professionals that supports the professional-personal life balance being sought by students and residents,” says Dr. Robert Boulay, President of the College of Family Physicians of Canada. “One of the key goals of the Patient's Medical Home is to offer patients a broad scope of services by a team of health care professionals, including the patient's personal family physician working together with other physicians, nurses, etc. In addition to improving access to care for patients, it will serve as a support to family physicians in achieving a balance between their personal and professional lives.”

Future doctors expect to produce efficiencies in health care delivery by expanding use of electronic medical records (EMRs) in their practice. While the 2010 NPS indicated that 39 per cent of current physicians have electronic records on a personal computer or laptop, 82 per cent of second-year residents plan to use EMRs in their practice. This is an increase from 75 per cent in 2007.

“As new doctors enter the work force, they bring new approaches to the practice of medicine,” said Dr. John Haggie, President of the Canadian Medical Association. “They understand intuitively that they can provide high quality, patient-centred care through the use of new technology and other tools. We need

to be open to changing how health care is delivered. The impact of the new electronic tools will be particularly evident in the rural areas.”

“Resident physicians know that meeting the health care needs of Canadians means working smarter,” states Dr. Adam Kaufman, President of the Canadian Association of Internes and Residents. “Canada's future medical leaders are committed to ensuring that our healthcare system provides the safest and highest quality of patient care. To do this we need a system that provides hands-on experience with up-to-date information and technologies, and an educational culture that supports and promotes patient safety through optimal resident education and training, safety, and well-being.”

The NPS student and resident data indicates that ten percent of family medicine residents plan to practice in rural areas, 4% in remote/isolated areas, and 20% in small towns.

The NPS is Canada’s largest census survey of physicians and physicians-in-training. It is conducted jointly by the College of Family Physicians of Canada, the Canadian Medical Association and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, with a financial contribution from the Canadian Institute for Health Information. The data provide meaningful information on attitudes among the country’s present and future physicians toward a wide range of critical issues.

For more information and to see the NPS 2010 data and highlights of the results, please go to www.nationalphysiciansurvey.ca.

A specialist physician analysis from the NPS research will be released in the coming months.

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