

Pulse

Growing dissatisfaction among Canada's rural MDs

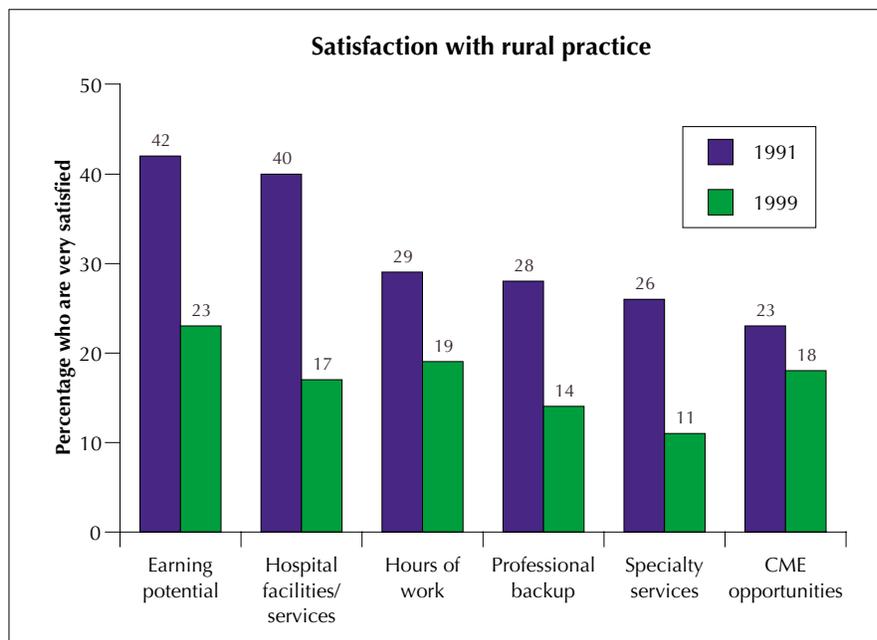
A recent CMA survey of rural physicians found a noticeable decrease in professional satisfaction levels since the early 1990s.

The survey asked physicians to rate both personal and professional factors, and while satisfaction with personal and family factors remained relatively constant, the level of satisfaction with professional factors fell significantly.

For example, the percentage of physicians very satisfied with their hospital facilities/services fell from 40% in 1991 to 17% in 1999. Similarly, the proportion who were very satisfied with professional backup and specialty services dropped by at least 50%.

Respondents were asked to list the top 3 characteristics that define a community as rural from a medical perspective, and the responses clearly showed the bleak horizon many rural MDs see. More than half of the responses included the following 4 items (in rank order):

- High level of on-call;
- Long distance to secondary referral centre;
- Lack of specialty services; and
- Too few GP/FPs



Other factors rounding out the top 10 were:

- Long distance to tertiary referral centre;
- Absence of equipment such as x-rays and laboratory services;
- Difficulty in obtaining locums;
- No ambulance service;
- Inability to provide services such as

obstetrics and general surgery; and

- Sparsely populated catchment areas.
- *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).

UK pumps \$30 billion into health spending

The United Kingdom is injecting at least £12 billion (about \$30 billion) into its National Health Service (NHS) over the next 6 years in order to bring spending up to the European average. The UK spends 6.7% of its



gross domestic product (GDP) on health care, while France spends 9.9% and Germany 10.4%; Canada spends 9.3% (CMAJ 1999;160:1730-4).

The new money will boost UK spending to 8% of GDP.

The unprecedented commitment means an annual increase in health spending of about 5% during each of the next 6 years. The announcement by Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair came on the heels of a January flu crisis that saw massive hospital overcrowding and treatment delays. Blair also promised to speed up NHS reforms and announced that middle-ranking nurses would receive a £1000 pay increase immediately. Meanwhile, NHS Direct, a patient-physician telephone consultation service, will be extended across the country by October, and more intensive-care beds will be opened. — *Barbara Sibbald*, CMAJ