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fine print

NPS survey methods

NPS Editorial Team

The National Physician Survey (NPS) is a survey of all physicians in Canada. It is made possible through the financial and in-kind contributions of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), The College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC), The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC), the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) and Health Canada.

The NPS 2007 questions evolved from the NPS 2004 plus earlier workforce surveys by the partner organizations. A working group approach was taken that included representatives from the CFPC, CMA, RCPSC and CIHI with input and review of questions by other affiliated societies. The NPS received ethical approval from the University of British Columbia Behavioural Ethics Review Board.

The 2007 edition of the NPS was carried out as a self-reported survey, which could be completed on paper or online. It comprised a shorter core questionnaire as well as 2 longer detailed questionnaires, 1 developed specifically for family physicians and general practitioners (FP/GPs) and the other for all other specialists.

The questions for the second-year resident and medical student components of the 2007 NPS evolved from questions used on the 2004 NPS. For second-year medical residents, 2 questionnaires were developed, 1 specific for family medicine residents, and a second specific to residents in all other specialty programs.

Surveys and reminders were mailed and emailed using the NPS masterfile contact list, which is populated with information from the membership databases of the CMA, the CFPC and the RCPSC.

Of the 60 811 physicians who were eligible to complete the NPS 2007, 19 239 responded for a rate of 32%. Results from core

questions (those appearing on both short and long questionnaires) are considered to be accurate within 1 percentage point of the true proportion 19 times out of 20. Estimates for questions in the long survey only are within 3.2 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

Of the 9162 students invited to complete the 2007 NPS, 2819 replied to the survey for an overall study response rate of 30.8%. Of the 2627 second-year residents invited to complete the 2007 NPS, 733 replied to the survey for an overall study response rate of 27.9% (28.8% among family medicine residents and 27.4% among residents in all other specialty programs).

Between January 2007 and April 2007, physicians received multiple mailings of either a hard copy survey or an online address. The file capturing online responses and the file created by data entry of returned paper responses were merged to create a single NPS database. Analysis and publication of survey results occur only at the aggregate level to protect individual respondent confidentiality.

Not every physician who received a survey completed it, but those who did appear to reflect the demographics of the overall physician population. To be more accurate, however, the results were weighted based on the actual overall physician distribution by age, sex, province and broad specialty. As well, a 1-page non-response survey was sent to all those who had not completed the questionnaire, and comparisons were made with the main respondent group on information such as hours worked in a week. It appears that the NPS respondent group is very representative of all physicians in Canada.

For more highlights of the NPS 2007 and NPS 2004 results, please go to www.nationalphysiciansurvey.ca