

## Survey shows striking variations in physicians' attitudes toward alternative medicine

By Melanie Comeau

A physician's sex and age have a major impact on their views about the role alternative/complementary medicine should play within the conventional health care system, new data from the National Physician Survey (NPS) indicate.

The 2007 survey of almost 20,000 physicians is the first national survey to seek physician input on this topic. One notable difference became clear when doctors were asked if "alternative/complementary medicine includes ideas from which conventional medicine could benefit." Fifty-three percent of female physicians agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 36% of males. FPs/GPs (45%) were also more likely to agree with it than other specialists (38%).

Respondents' ages revealed a similar difference. Physicians 65 and older (25%) are far more likely than those 35 or younger (10%) to think that "alternative medicine is a threat to public health."

The number of years since licensure also affects attitudes. Half of physicians (51%) licensed less than five years ago agree that conventional medicine can benefit from alternative forms of care, significantly more than the 37% total among MDs licensed 20 or more years ago.

The 2007 NPS also pointed to concerns about the scientific rigour applied to the testing of alternative medicines and therapies, with 67% of surgical specialists and 61% of medical specialists agreeing that "treatments not tested in a scientifically recognized manner should be discouraged."

Among FPs and GPs, there were significant variations in responses to that statement. For FPs/GPs licensed fewer than 10 years, less than half the graduates of Canadian schools (48%) agreed with the statement, compared with 62% of international medical graduates.

However, just 29% of medical students and 32% of residents agreed with the statement, a marked difference from the result among practising physicians (60%).

The NPS, co-sponsored by the CMA, College of Family Physicians of Canada and the Royal College, is conducted every three years and is the largest survey of its type in Canada. - Melanie Comeau, Researcher, CMA Canadian Collaborative Centre for Physician Resources

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