

NPS Primer, October 2009: Generational Differences

The National Physician Survey is Canada's largest census survey, with nearly 20,000 physicians, participating in the 2007 cycle. The NPS is produced by the Royal College, the College of Family Physicians of Canada and the Canadian Medical Association.

This edition of the NPS Primer focuses on generational trends among specialists, including family physicians (FPs/GPs), concerning work settings and locations, and impediments to care. Understanding these differences is key to anticipating future medical workforce and system changes.

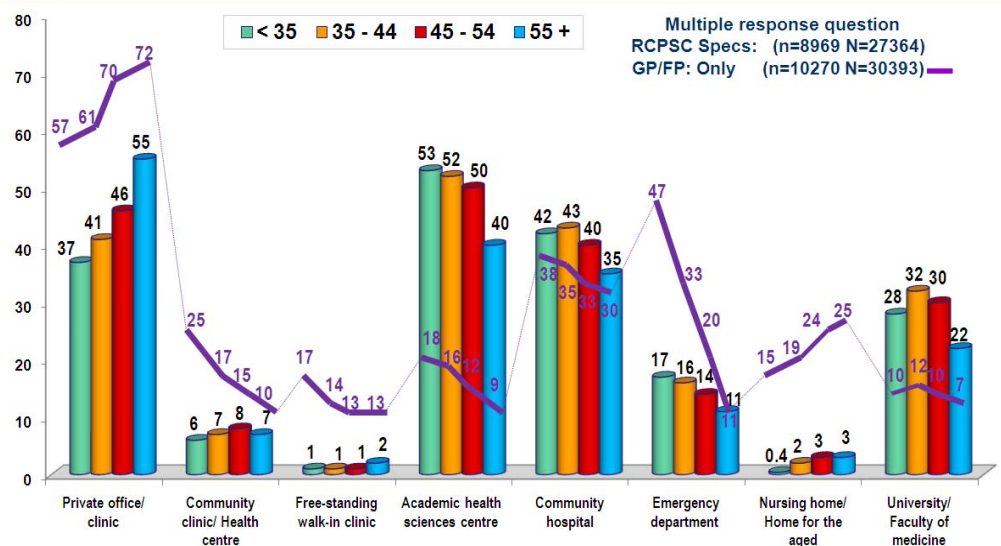
Moving away from traditional work settings

At the aggregate level, 67% of FP/GPs and 47.5% of other specialist physicians (SPs) work in private offices/clinics. However, if we look at responses by age group, younger FP/GPs and SPs are moving away from these work settings. For instance:

- 72% of FP/GPs aged 55+ reported working in private offices/clinics in contrast to 57% of FP/GPs <35. Similarly, 55% of SPs aged 55+ stated they work in private offices/clinics in contrast to 37% of SPs <35.
- Younger FP/GPs and SPs are choosing alternative sites. The majority of SPs <35 (53%) stated largely practicing in academic health science centres - and a significant number of FP/GPs (47%) are working in emergency departments.



Figure 1 - Work setting by age group
% distribution: SPs and FP/GPs (2007 NPS)



Source: 2007 National Physician Survey. The College of Family Physicians of Canada, Canadian Medical Association, The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

This increasing trend away from private offices/clinics, is likely to continue based on responses of second year family medicine (FM) and specialty medicine (SM) residents in the 2004 and 2007 NPS. As Table 1 shows:

2004 NPS	FM (%)	SM (%)	All Res. (%)
Yes	24.2	24.3	24.2
No	38.3	36.9	37.5
Unsure	24.2	29.4	27.4
2007 NPS			
Yes	21.6	16.2	18.3
No	55.3	46.1	49.7
Unsure	16.7	32.6	26.5
Differences 2004/2007 NPS			
Yes	-2.6	-8.1	-5.9
No	+17	+9.2	+12.2
Unsure	-7.5	+3.2	-0.9

- In 2004, almost one-quarter of FM and SM residents stated that they would buy/set-up their own practice. By 2007, this option had declined by almost 3% for FM residents and by just over 8% among SM residents.
- Conversely, while just over a third of

FM and SM residents stated in 2004 that they would not buy/set-up their own practice, by 2007, for FM residents this increased to over 55%, and 46% for SM residents.

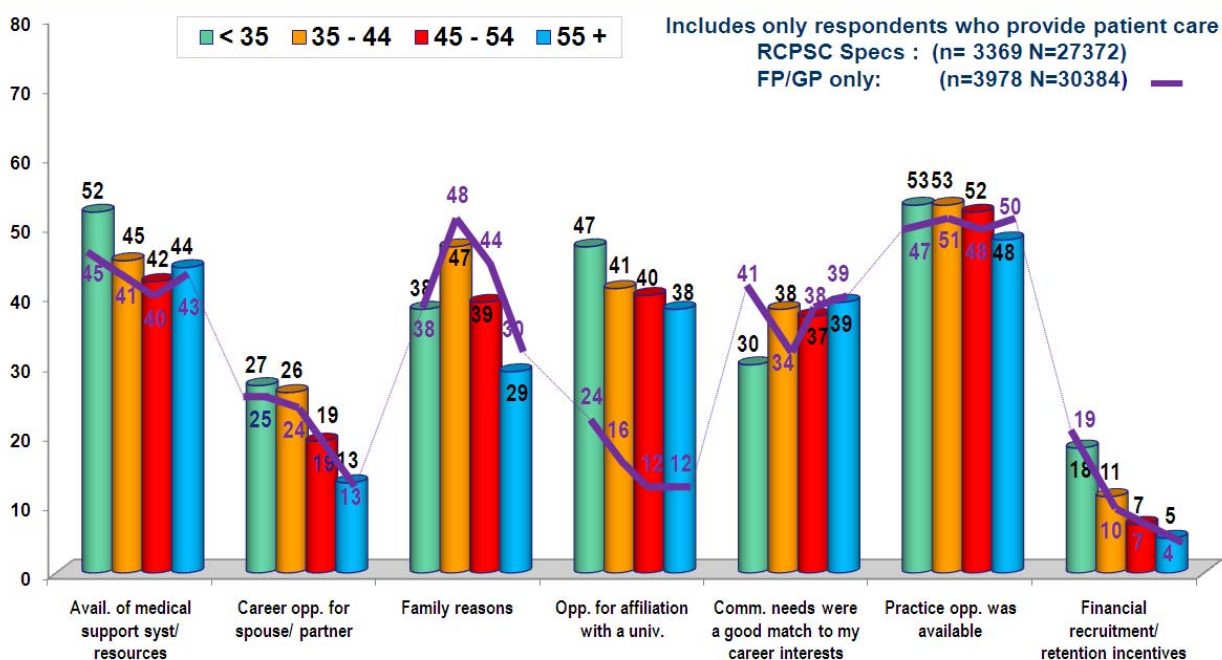
Research and education: A high priority among specialists

Apart from SP physicians aged 55 and above, the majority of SP physicians select AHSCs as their work setting. (Figure 1) The interest in research and education in SP practice is likely to be continued by young SPs and SMs.

- As figure 2 below shows, the opportunity for affiliation with a university ranks highest for SPs aged <35 (47%), approximately 7% above the aggregate response of all SPs.
- SPs <35 were the largest group to indicate they will increase the time devoted to teaching and research within the following two years.¹



Figure 2 - Main reasons current work location selected by age group, % distribution: SPs and FP/GPs (2007 NPS)



Source: 2007 National Physician Survey. The College of Family Physicians of Canada, Canadian Medical Association, The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

- From the 2004 to the 2007 NPS, a strong upward trend is conveyed by SM 2nd year residents toward teaching and education after they complete their training. (Table 2)

Other factors influencing choice of work location

In contrast with physicians aged 55+, younger physicians seem to consider a wider array of factors when choosing their work location. As figure 2 above shows:

Table 2: Involvement upon completion of residency training		
2004 NPS		
	SM	All Res.
Teaching/education	46.1	40.5
Research	44.5	34.3
2007 NPS		
Teaching/education	76.1	72.2
Research	48.3	34.2
Differences 2004/2007 NPS		
Teaching/education	+30.0	+31.7
Research	+3.8	-0.1

¹ NPS 2007, Q35: Changes to your practice".

- Career opportunities for a spouse/partner and family reasons significantly influence the choice of work location for younger physicians.
- Financial recruitment/retention incentives are more important for physicians <35.
- The availability of medical support system and resources was an important factor for all physicians. However, SPs aged <35 had the highest response, with over half citing it as a major factor.

Here again, responses by FM and SM 2nd year residents within the 2007 NPS help illuminate these results:

- Availability of medical support systems and resources was a very important factor for both FM (68.8%) and SM (62.3%) residents in achieving a satisfying and successful medical practice.
- Medical debt exerts a considerable influence on the choice of work settings by young physicians (both FM and SM): 45.5% of FM residents and 37.4% of SP residents who anticipate carrying debt said they would practice where they are offered a financial incentive.

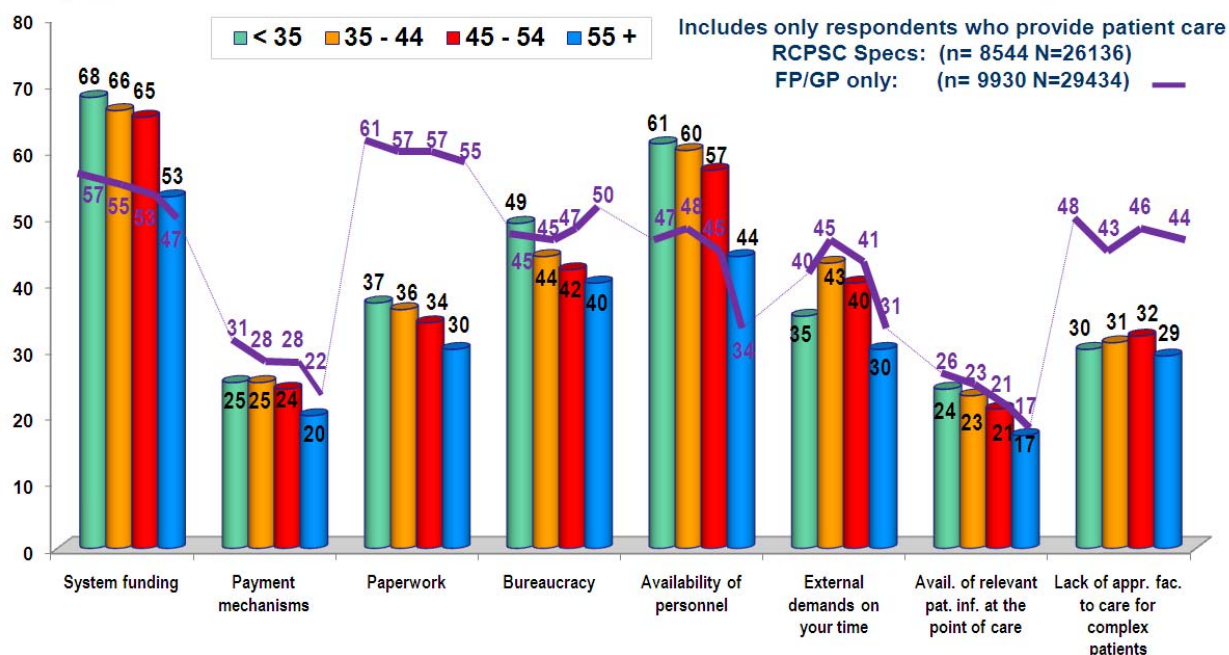
Impediments to the provision of care

As figure 3 below shows, across all age groups, SP physicians identify system funding and FP/GP physicians chose paperwork as their major impediment to care. However, other differences in responses between the two groups exist, and across ages for both populations.

- Younger physicians report more impediments to care than their older counterparts.
- Nearly half of all SPs <35 cite bureaucracy as a major impediment, 7% above the aggregate responses rate for all SPs
- Availability of personnel is a major concern for SPs aged <55, but less so for FP/GPs.
- External demands on your time is a major concern for both FP/GPs and SPs aged 35-54. This is not surprising given the premium medical residents place on work life balance, as well as the impact of dependent care on physician work hours (see NPS Primer: Work Hours, at: http://rcpsc.medical.org/publicpolicy/nps_workhours_e.pdf)



Figure 3 - Major impediments to your delivery of care to your patients by age group, % distribution: SPs and FP/GPs (2007 NPS)



Source: 2007 National Physician Survey. The College of Family Physicians of Canada, Canadian Medical Association, The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.