



March 14, 2006 Volume 42 Issue 09

Gastro upset looms

Study highlights serious shortfall of specialists in Canada

By David Hodges

[Back to Cover](#)

BANFF, ALTA. | Compared with other Western countries, Canada has a serious shortage of gastroenterologists and is heading for a major manpower crisis within the next 10 years, a study presented at the recent Canadian Digestive Disease Week meeting here suggests.

Data compiled by the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology (CAG) show Canada needs to immediately increase the number of residency positions in gastroenterology to not only beef up the current number of specialists in this area, but also to counteract the rapidly aging population of practising gastroenterologists in the country.

Currently, Canada has 550 practising gastroenterologists, of whom one-third are expected to retire by 2016. In terms of distribution of services across the country, there are 1.83 specialists per 100,000 population.

"If we compare that internationally, we're not doing very well at all," said Dr. Paul Moayyedi, an assistant professor of medicine in the intestinal disease research program at McMaster University in Hamilton, who led the CAG study.

The research looked at the total number of gastroenterologists and the ratio of gastroenterologists per 100,000 population in Canada, France, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. The findings, Dr. Moayyedi said, are very significant because there was previously no reliable database to determine these types of numbers in Canada.

Using billing information from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, he and his colleagues identified a gastroenterologist as any doctor who had performed at least 100 colonoscopies or gastroscopies per year. When they surveyed the gastroenterology manpower resources of the other countries involved in the study, France, the U.S. and Australia all came out on top.

Only the U.K., at 1.4 gastroenterologists per 100,000 population, had a smaller ratio than Canada. However, the U.K. has instituted a plan to increase its number of specialists to approximately four per 100,000.

"The U.K. realized it had a problem," Dr. Moayyedi said. "Five to 10 years ago, it had a much greater problem than it does now, and they're actually growing the number of gastro-enterologists with training. New consultants are growing about 7% per year and that is set to continue for the next 10 years."

Australia, which had only a marginally better ratio of gastroenterologists per 100,000 population, is likewise doing something about the problem. "They have an annual growth rate of new consultants coming on at about 2% per year, and they're planning to double their gastroenterology trainee intake within the next 10 years," Dr. Moayyedi said.

In terms of regional differences between gastroenterology services within Canada, Ontario and Quebec, with approximately two gastroenterologists per 100,000 population, are faring better than the rest of the country.

Saskatchewan and Manitoba, at the opposite end of the spectrum, have ratios of 1.2 per 100,000—a problem further compounded by the fact that nearly half of the gastroenterologists in these provinces are expected to retire within the next decade, Dr. Moayyedi said.

"We have to start from here, and we have to move forward to make gastroenterology something to be proud of in the 21st century," he concluded.

[Back to Contents](#)

© Copyright 2006 *The Medical Post*. All rights reserved.

