



Medicine as a career choice

When do students choose medicine as a career? One-fifth of medical students decided they wanted to be doctors before high school. An additional 33% of students made this decision during high school; 36%, decided during their undergraduate studies; and 9% decided some time after completing college or university. Students who grew up in exclusively or predominantly rural environments tended to make their career choices earlier than students who grew up in urban environments ($P=.04$). Female students tended to make their career choices earlier than male students ($P<.01$) (National Physician Survey [NPS] 2007).

When does one choose a specialty? Twelve percent of practising physicians decided on their preferred (current) fields of medicine before medical school, 16% during medical school but before clerkship; 27% during clerkship; 19% during residency; and 18% after a period of time in practice (NPS 2004).

What influences choice of specialty? Medical students were asked to rate their satisfaction with

exposure to different medical specialties. There was a continual increase in satisfaction, from 42% of first-year students to 52% of second-year students to 73% of third- and fourth-year students satisfied to very satisfied.

Sixty-one percent of third- and fourth-year medical students agreed that their medical educations had prepared them (or would prepare them) to select residency training programs (NPS 2007).

Factors influencing career choice are listed in **Table 1**.

Results are based on the 2004 and 2007 NPS, a unique collaborative project of the College of Family Physicians of Canada, the Canadian Medical Association, and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. Additional results are available at www.nationalphysiciansurvey.ca.


If you would like the opportunity to develop and write a future Fast Fact using the NPS results, please contact **Sarah Scott**, National Physician Survey and Janus Project Coordinator, at 800 387-6197, extension 289, or sks@cfpc.ca. 

Table 1. Percentage of respondents indicating each factor as an influence in their career choice

FACTORS	MEDICAL STUDENTS CHOOSING MEDICINE AS A CAREER (NPS 2007), %	FAMILY MEDICINE RESIDENTS CHOOSING FAMILY MEDICINE RESIDENCY (NPS 2007), %	OTHER SPECIALTY MEDICINE RESIDENTS CHOOSING THEIR RESIDENCIES (NPS 2007), %	PRACTISING FAMILY PHYSICIANS CHOOSING FAMILY MEDICINE (NPS 2004), %	OTHER PRACTISING SPECIALISTS CHOOSING THEIR SPECIALTIES (NPS 2004), %
Intellectual stimulation and challenge	93	65	88	74	84
Doctor-patient relationship	83	85	54	71	56
Workload flexibility or predictability	NA	79	50	45	38
Influence of a mentor	19	26	44	20	42
Influence of family	24	17	8	23	17
Prestige	26	3	11	14	13
Earning potential	42	8	28	29	23
Research opportunities	21	2	28	5	17
Teaching opportunities	40	23	37	14	26
Ability to pursue non-work-related interests	NA	55	28	21	16
Availability of training opportunities	NA	27	18	10	14

NA—not asked, NPS—National Physician Survey.