



Family physicians and nutrition counseling

According to a Canadian Community Health Survey, in 2004 36% of Canadians were overweight and an additional 23% fit the criteria for obesity.¹

In his 2003 article, Dr Walter Rosser advised Canadian FPs to be more involved in offering nutritional advice to patients.² He also suggested more training was needed in this area.² Fortunately, recent National Physician Survey (NPS) data indicate that Canadian FPs' involvement in providing nutrition counseling, as well as their collaboration with nutritionists and dietitians, is on the rise.

In 2001, 16% of Canadian FPs had access to dietitians as part of their practices. By 2004, 26% of FPs shared patient care with nutritionists or dietitians. The 2007 NPS revealed that 52% of FPs collaborated with dietitians or nutritionists and 42% offered nutrition counseling as part of their practices. Provinces with lower proportions of physicians offering nutrition counseling, such as Quebec or Saskatchewan, had higher ratings of collaboration with dietitians and nutritionists (Figure 1).

Among second-year family medicine residents, 81% indicated that they had collaborated with dietitians or nutritionists as part of their training and 77% planned to collaborate with them as part of their practices. Of these

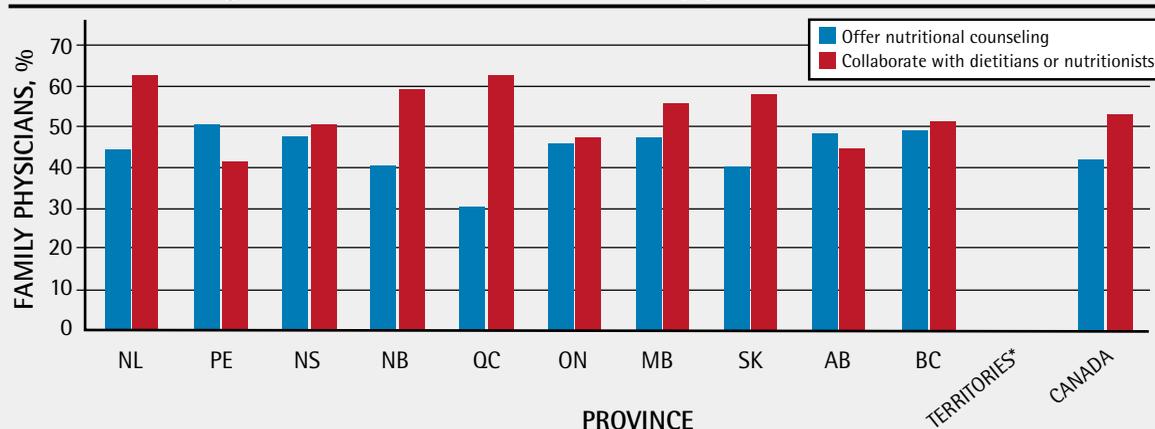
trainees, 39% thought they were adequately trained in nutrition counseling, with the same proportion planning to offer the service once they entered family practice. Among medical students, however, 23% of first-year students were not at all familiar with the work done by dietitians or nutritionists. But that number decreased to 17% for second-year students and 10% for third- and fourth-year students.

The NPS is a 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 **Harleen Sahota**, National Physician Survey Project Manager, at 800 387-6197, extension 416, or hs@cfpc.ca. 

References

1. Tjepkema M. *Adult obesity in Canada: measured height and weight*. Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada; 2005. Available from: www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-620-m/2005001/article/adults-adultes/8060-eng.htm. Accessed 2010 Jan 19.
2. Rosser WW. Nutritional advice in Canadian family practice. *Am J Clin Nutr* 2003;77(4 Suppl):1011S-5S.

Figure 1. Proportion of family physicians in Canada offering nutritional counseling and collaborating with dietitians or nutritionists, by province



*Results for the Territories suppressed because of small cell counts