



Club Meds

Canadians and drugs GIANCARLO LA GIORGIA

From popping the occasional over-the-counter (OTC) headache pill to downing daily doses of prescription drugs to keep heart disease at bay, taking medication is a fact — and, for some, a necessity — of life. Here's a look at the stats.

PICK YOUR RX More than 5,000 prescription drugs are available in Canada, in addition to about 17,000 OTC medications.¹

BULGING MEDICINE CHEST In 2007, Canadians spent \$19 billion on prescription medications — about \$45 per prescription on an average of 13 prescriptions per person.²

PATIENT, HEAL THYSELF Each year, 83% of adult Canadians use OTC medications, 59% take multivitamins and 27% take herbal remedies in the hope of either preventing or treating illness.³

GOLDEN-AGE HAZE Canadians age 65 and over make up just 12% of the population but consume 25% to 30% of all prescription medications.¹

DANGEROUS COCKTAIL Alcohol-medication interactions are estimated to be a factor in at least 25% of all emergency-room visits.¹

CODE BLUNDER Of registered nurses polled in hospitals, 19% acknowledged that during the year before being surveyed, errors involving medication for patients had occurred occasionally or frequently.⁴

STRESS FACTOR Medication errors were highest among registered nurses who had low job security (32%), had the least favourable working relations with physicians

(27%) and usually worked overtime (22%). These figures were cut in half among nurses reporting the opposite working situations.⁴

BIGGER PILL BILL Spending on prescription drugs rose 71% (in 2002 dollars) between 1992 and 2002, while food spending increased only 11% during the same period. Fortunately, out-of-pocket prescription drug expenses remained a small percentage of the overall household budget — less than 1%.⁴

SLACKENING GROWTH Canadian retail pharmacies filled 422.6 million prescriptions in 2007, a 6% increase over 2006 but still the slowest growth in a decade.²

GENERIC JUMP In 2007, 48% of all filled prescriptions were for generic drugs, a 14% increase over the previous year.²

EXPIRATIONS The patents on \$1.2 billion worth of brand name medications expired in 2007, with 60% of this amount represented by two drugs alone: Aventis's Altace (a blood pressure reducer) and Wyeth's Effexor XR (an antidepressant).²

DRUG EXPORTS DOWN Cross-border Internet pharmacy sales to the U.S. declined by almost 50% in 2006, to \$211 million, compared with \$420 million in 2006. The decline in exports was mainly attributed to the relative strength of the Canadian dollar.² ☞

¹Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission; ²Intercontinental Medical Statistics Canada; ³Nonprescription Drug Manufacturers Association of Canada; ⁴Statistics Canada