



Ipsos Reid



Stakeholder Perspectives on Risk Communication

Sept 30 2009

Nobody's Unpredictable

Background

- In the context of climate change and ever-increasing concern over its impact on the health and well-being of the Canadian population, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) decided to conduct qualitative research among physicians in order to determine physician and patient information needs vis-à-vis health and the environment.
- Health Canada and the Canadian Medical Association commissioned Ipsos Reid to conduct this research.

Research Purpose

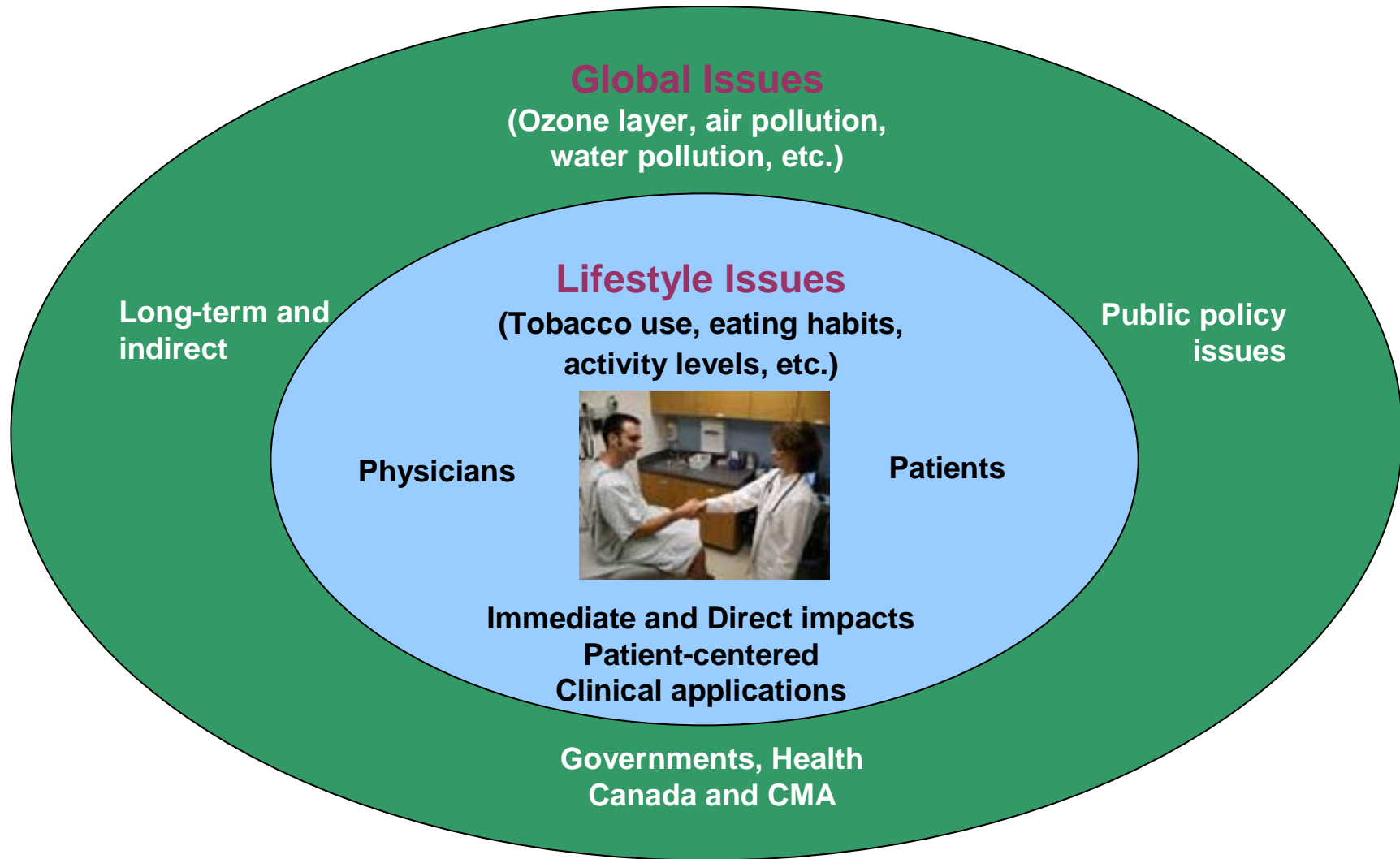
- The original purpose of the research was to gain a better understanding of physicians' views with regard to:
 - environmental health priorities;
 - information gaps in environmental health of concern to physicians;
 - Preferred route for environmental health information;
 - Preferred tools to communicate to and with their patients; and,
 - Recommendations for accountabilities (relating to HC and CMA).

How do physicians define health and the environment?

- Participants defined health and the environment in very broad terms:
 - Large scale global public health issues that are broad in scope, affect the entire population and where the solution is societal.
 - Lifestyle issues that relate to the “small-scale” environment, that is, the environment in which an individual lives.



Categories of Environmental Impacts



Are physicians concerned about environmental health?

“A lot of these things, we have no control over. There are things within the person’s household that you can encourage them to change, but global issues like air pollution – we have no power to influence.”

“It’s not that we don’t have information, it’s that we don’t know where we stand—it changes every 10 minutes, the consensus is not in yet.”

« L’intervention à ce niveau appartient aux pouvoirs publics...dans les moyens d’intervenir sur l’environnement, mais pas le médecin. »

« L’environnement, c’est pas notre spécialité. On n’est pas des environnementalistes. »

“We need to pay attention to these issues (environmental exposure and impacts on health) so that we are all more aware, but I wouldn’t spend any more time on it than that.”

Are physicians concerned about health and the environment?

The focus group findings suggest that:

- Environment plays a minor role in the practices of physicians.
 - From the clinician perspective, the cause is not relevant because the diagnosis and treatment don't change.
- Participants were very concerned about environment and health as a public policy issue
 - Over the longer term, they expect to see an increased impact on the health of their patients

Do environmental factors play a role in clinical practice?

“We are mostly concerned with treatable things, things we can do something about.”

“I would say I spend less than five percent of my time dealing with these types of issues.”

“Environmental factors are just a small part of what we do.”

« Il n’y a pas une flambée de maladies avec une cause environnementale. »

“If a patient has cancer, it doesn’t matter how they got it, it is our role to treat it. The fact that it might be due to some environmental factor does not change the prognosis nor does it change the treatment options.”

Do environmental factors play a role in clinical practice?

- The environment plays a very minor role in the context of their clinical practice.
 - environmental issues are preventative, not clinical.
 - Some said that their role is curative and that, aside from lifestyle issues, environmental impacts are a question of public policy and not medicine.
- They are very rarely asked questions environmental impacts on health by their patients.
 - They regularly field lifestyle questions and issues like food products and smoking cessation.
- There is an increase in questions when there is a public health scare in the media (Listeriosis, SARS, etc.).

Do physicians feel equipped?

“You can Google anything. You just have to search for it.”

“It would be helpful to have all of it brought together in one place, but with the Internet, I can usually find what I need pretty easily.”

“Public Health does a pretty good job – especially when it comes to health scares like SARS, for example.”

“It is impossible to find what you are looking for on Health Canada’s website.”

“The CMAJ has some articles on this stuff sometimes, they’re usually pretty helpful.”

“I subscribe to medical journals...I often use them as resources.”

Do physicians feel equipped to answer questions on environmental impacts on health?

- Most said they had access to sufficient information to field the rare questions they receive from patients.
- For their own information, the sources they currently consult for this kind of information are primarily Internet-based.
 - Most cited online medical journals, the Health Canada website and public health websites as the sources they usually rely on. Some prefer to consult the print versions of journals.
- When they need to direct their patients to information on this type of information, they also tend to refer them to websites.

Is there a need for more information for physicians and their patients?

“Interest needs to be provoked; the information is out there...”

« C’est sûr que les facteurs de risques sont importants, mais on ne sait toujours pas...de façon précise, l’impact de l’environnement sur la santé. »

“I went to one [EH CME] last year and...well...we were a small group.”

“Websites are the most convenient place to get information.”

“We’re getting overloaded with information...we get three to four journals a day...nobody has time to read it all.”

“It would be nice to have something to hand out on key issues. Like the smoking cessation pamphlets. But, it has to be easy to read for the public. It has to be short and to the point.”

Is there a need for more information for physicians and their patients?

- Neither a great nor urgent need for more information sources.
- However, some need for some information for their patients.
 - When asked to identify topics on which this information should focus, most identified issues that would fall under the “lifestyle” or “small-scale” category.
- According to most participants, the best way to transmit this information to them and to their patients is a mix of online and paper.
- In terms of educational needs, most agreed that while they might attend a continuing medical education course on environmental impacts on health, they do not see a great need for these types of opportunities more than two to three times a year.
- Some physicians felt that there was very little evidence based information on which to act

Best laid plans

- The first phase of research revealed that:
 - Environmental impacts on health play a minimal role in the day-to-day clinical practices of the physicians
 - Physicians view EH as larger public health and public policy issue, not medical

- New Rules:
 - Understand how environmental impacts on health are perceived by physicians in terms of the role they play in clinical care,
 - Understand what information physicians need in order to view environmental factors as clinical care issues, including the evidence base demonstrating where their practice might change.



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