



Manitoba on verge of regulating midwifery

With Manitoba expected to introduce regulated midwifery this spring, the January issue of the Manitoba Medical Association's *Inter-Com* summarized key parts of the MMA's position. The MMA supports implementation of regulated, hospital-based midwifery and hopes that it will eliminate lay midwifery but believes that all providers who practise obstetrics should be overseen by a single regulatory agency. Since independent practice is contrary to the thrust of health care reform, midwives and physicians should support each other in collaborative practice. The MMA also says that primary care of the newborn should remain the responsibility of the family physician or pediatrician.

Inter-Com also reported on demand for midwifery and home birth in the US, where regulated nurse

midwifery has existed since 1975. Data from the US National Centre for Health Statistics (1993) show that over 2 decades demand for midwifery has grown to account for 5% of all births, which "seems modest in view of the significant cost saving to US patients who choose a midwife rather than a physician." The MMA said similar demand in Manitoba would result in 900 midwife-assisted births — many fewer than the 5000 to 6000 births projected by midwifery proponents.

Informed consent needed before HIV testing of pregnant mothers: CMA

The CMA says physicians should *strongly recommend* that pregnant mothers be tested for HIV, reaffirming a position outlined in its 1995 *Counselling Guidelines for HIV Testing*. The issue arose after a mo-

tion stating that "all pregnant women should undergo HIV testing" was put forward at the 1996 annual meeting but referred to the Board of Directors; there was some confusion about whether this was a call for mandatory testing. In March the Board of Directors decided that the association's policy will state that HIV testing should "be strongly recommended" for these patients. With rare exceptions, "a patient's informed consent must be obtained prior to testing." (One rare exception involves incapacitated patients whose organs are being harvested for transplantation.)

The question of testing during pregnancy raises major issues for medicine. On one hand, detection of HIV would allow a mother to take medications and perhaps protect the fetus from infection. Detection could also protect the infant after birth by making the mother aware that she should not breast-feed. On the other hand, mandatory testing raises delicate issues about patient rights. The CMA's *Counselling Guidelines for HIV Testing* make this clear. "If the woman has *chosen* to be tested," they state, "obtain and record receipt of informed consent."

The board heard opinions on both sides. One member argued that mandatory testing would help protect the fetus and also might help the mother by making it possible for her to receive new treatments. He added that detection of infection in a mother might also protect society from the heavy costs of providing care for an infected infant.

However, another board member said knowledge about HIV is evolving and at this point it is wiser for physicians to educate patients about the disease and suggest that they be tested instead of forcing them to take a test. The CMA's existing counselling guidelines took a year to develop and involved an extensive consultation process.

Bill C-71: bloody but unbowed

Health Minister David Dingwall's somewhat battered antitobacco legislation passed third reading by a 139-37 majority in the House of Commons in March. Besides restricting young people's access to cigarettes and increasing tobacco taxes, Bill C-71 severely restricts how tobacco companies can advertise or display their corporate logos at cultural and sporting events such as jazz festivals and auto races.

The bill was the subject of intense lobbying by tobacco manufacturers, Quebec politicians and Montrealers who positioned the bill as a direct attack on a city that benefits greatly from tobacco sponsorship. Dingwall, who agreed to delay implementation of sponsorship provisions for at least a year, said the bill is meant to save lives. "The government stands solidly behind



David Dingwall

children and people across the country to fight tobacco consumption," he said the day before the Commons vote. The legislation's future is by no means certain; analysts predict it will face a rocky ride in the Senate, where the Liberals hold a 1-seat majority.