“Dr. Peter” lives on through AIDS daycare centre

During his lengthy battle with AIDS, Dr. Peter Jepson-Young tried to live life to the full. “Dr. Peter” was well known in Vancouver for his AIDS Diaries, which described how he lived with AIDS. They first appeared on local television, and then he received a national profile on the CBC during his last 2 years of life. Shortly before he died in 1992, he told his family and friends to do something to provide “comfort care” to help patients living with AIDS maintain their independence.

Passport guarantors: if you sign, do not bill

Now that physicians are charging patients for a wide range of “uninsured” medical services, it isn’t surprising that some areas of confusion are developing. A good example involves patients’ requests for a doctor to act as guarantor for a passport application.

Every application must be signed by a guarantor, who must be a professional such as a physician, lawyer or minister who has known the applicant for at least 2 years. One of the caveats is that the guarantor cannot receive any form of compensation. If they do accept payment the application becomes invalid and the applicant will be ordered to submit a new form signed by a different guarantor.

Passport officials are rigid on this policy — they say the rule is designed to ensure that unscrupulous people will not be encouraged to act as a guarantor simply for the fee involved. Although charging a patient for this service will not land a physician in court, this kind of misunderstanding can result in a potentially embarrassing and time-consuming problem for applicants, who will often request that their payment be returned. (This has already happened in Nova Scotia.) The headaches involved are a substantial nuisance and physicians could avoid them by not charging for this service. — © Dorothy Grant, coordinator, patient-physician relations, Medical Society of Nova Scotia

Wanted: more Newfoundland MDs

Comments that there are no major problems with physician supply in Newfoundland have been met with derision by the provincial medical society and its
members. “He's dreaming,” scoffed Bonavista, Nfld., family physician Chris Randell following comments by John Peddle, executive director of the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Care Association. “Here in Bonavista we’ve been living on locums for a year and without them there is no way we would be able to survive.”

Randell says that of the 10 full-time family physicians who used to serve the approximately 12 000 people in Bonavista and surrounding area last year, only 3 remain. He adds that the situation is putting severe strains on both physician and patient. “It's a very difficult situation for me because I grew up in this community and I have to turn people away because I just can't handle any more patients.”

Dr. Karl Misik, president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association, also spoke out. He said Peddle's comments don't acknowledge that doctors and other health care professionals have been working extremely hard to make up for the system's shortcomings. “If we pretend this problem does not exist, we will only face a larger and more severe crisis in the near future. Those working in the system cannot fill these gaps indefinitely; and concerted, system-wide action is required immediately.”

Back in Bonavista, Randell is more blunt. “We need more doctors. Right now we’re just not competitive [in remunerating physicians], but new funds will have to be found for health if people are going to be able to get the level of care they expect.”

Cost of workplace injuries soars

A new American study has found that occupational injuries and illnesses exact a heavy toll in terms of health care spending, costing more than AIDS or Alzheimer disease. The study, conducted by researchers in the Department of Economics at California's...