

News @ a glance

HIV rising: The number of women living with HIV has increased in every region of the world over the past 2 years, states a joint UNAIDS and WHO report. The steepest increases are in East Asia (56% increase), followed by Eastern Europe and Central Asia (48% increase). Women now make up nearly half of the 37.2 million adults (15–49) living with HIV worldwide. In sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 60% of adults living with HIV are women — some 13.3 million. Women are more physically susceptible to HIV infection than men (male-to-female transmission during sex is about twice as likely to occur as female-to-male transmission), and many women and girls, particularly in Southern Africa, have to use sex as a commodity in exchange for food and necessities. AIDS Epidemic Update 2004 estimates that 39.4 million people now live with HIV (up from 36.6 million in 2002).



Art Explosion

30 minutes: Several US emergency rooms are being held up to the standards set by pizza delivery businesses. At St. Anne and St. Charles Mercy Hospitals in Toledo, Ohio, for example, anyone who waits longer than 30 minutes receives a gift certificate for a hardware store or passes to a theatre. That might not ease a patient's suffering, but it is meant to underscore the message that the hospital takes its service seriously. Dr. Alan Drummond, past president of the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, insists that the approach has merit. "Every institution should recognize that their emergency department is a key part of their marketing strategy," says Drummond, head of emergency at the Great War Memorial Hospital

in Perth, Ont. "In our small town, when our community thinks about our hospital, the first thing they think about is the quality of the emergency service provided. That's how they judge you." — *Tim Lougheed, Ottawa*

Tuition woes: The average tuition fees for first year medical students will exceed \$10 000 for the first time next September, according to data from the CMA Research Directorate. This academic year, the national average fee is \$9814. When Quebec is excluded, the average jumps to \$12 792. Fees have tripled since 1995–96. The Canadian Federation of Medical Students is concerned escalating fees are limiting access to medical school. "It will change the demographics of medicine," said CFMS Accessibility Officer Nick Rose. The federation is lobbying the federal government to increase student loans. Many students now graduate with debts of \$100 000. The biggest increases now are in Western Canada said Rose. Fees at the University of British Columbia increased a whopping 36% (\$10 272 to \$14 000) this year. But the highest tuition fees are at the University of Toronto (\$16 207). The lowest are at the University of Montreal (\$2224).

Tsunami warning: India plans to install a deep-sea warning system to provide alerts of possible tsunamis, following the Dec. 26 natural disaster. The country now has 20 deep-sea buoys with sensors. It will add another 20 and deploy 6 to 12 Deep Ocean Assessment and Reporting Systems (DOARS)

about 6 km below the sea surface. Essentially pressure sensors mounted on buoys, the DOARS will be able to detect and record changes in seawater movements and transmit signals to a satellite. The project will cost an estimated US\$27 million and take 30 months to complete. Tsunamis are rare in the Indian Ocean, and the South Asian nations recently affected did not have a warning system on the lines of the Pacific Tsunami Warning System. India plans a more formal scientific link-up with this system once its own is in place. — *SciDev.net*

1:3 nurses retire: A slight increase in the overall number of nurses in Canada may foster the impression that the shortage is ending. In fact, within a decade or so, a third of Canadian nurses will be getting ready to retire and given that only 1 in 10 nurse is now under age 30 there won't be nearly enough new nurses to replace retirees. The Canadian Nurses Association warns this could have "pretty dire consequences" for patient care. According to 3 new reports from the Canadian Institute of Health Information, the average age of Canadian nurses reached 44.5 years in 2003. In all, 334 006 nurses (RNs, licensed practical nurses and registered psychiatric nurses) were licensed to practise in 2003,



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an increase of 1.4% from 2002. But only 241 342 of those nurses were employed, of whom only 53.5% worked at full-time jobs, an increase of 1% from the previous year. The Canadian Nurses Association has noted a trend toward hiring nurses on a casual or part-time basis leaving them without job security or benefits. Despite complaints the situation has improved only slightly. — Compiled by Barbara Sibbald, *CMAJ*