

to stop this disease in its tracks,” he said. “It can be done.”

No concrete initiatives stemmed from the 2-day meeting, but participants stated in a Communiqué that it was an “important step” toward a long-term sustained political and institutional engagement. They identified a huge number of needs, including a harmonized global approach to research and development, along with increased production capacity, access and distribution of vaccine and antiviral agents.

Mexico’s call for developed nations to reserve 10% of antivirals for poorer nations was put aside. Instead, the ministers decided it might be more appropriate for the 10 or so countries that have adequate supplies of the drugs, including Canada, to develop a way to share, such as through the WHO stockpile.

Only about 40 countries are ready for a pandemic, said Dr. Jong-wook Lee, Director General of WHO. “We must help countries stockpile.”

Roche International, the manufacturer of oseltamivir (Tamiflu), has promised WHO 30 million capsules of oseltamivir to cover 3 million people; enough for 1 million has been delivered.

The best protection, Lee added, is an effective vaccine, but that can’t be developed until a human strain emerges, after which a vaccine will take months to produce. There is also insufficient global manufacturing capacity to produce the quantities needed. “It’s a huge challenge,” he said. “We need investment.”

Delegates also agreed that coordinated risk communications among countries and institutions is needed to avoid public panic.

It may already be too late. In the midst of the conference, Roche Canada decided to temporarily stop shipping oseltamivir to private pharmacies in face of an unprecedented demand and fears of dwindling stock. In September, about 4000 prescriptions for the drug were filled for Canadians, compared to 421 in September 2004.

A Nov 7–9 international meeting on avian and pandemic influenza will “bring concerns to the next stage,” said Lee. — Barbara Sibbald, *CMAJ*

News @ a glance

HPV vaccine: An experimental vaccine has proved highly effective at preventing cervical cancer caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV) strains 16 and 18. These strains account for 70% of all cervical cancer. The phase 3, 2-year study involved more than 12 167 women, ages 16 to 26, in the US and 12 other countries. Merck & Co., which is developing the vaccine Gardasil, plans to apply for approval to the Food and Drug Administration this year and to have the vaccine on the market by 2006. Merck Frosst Canada Ltd. plans to submit approval information to Health Canada in 2006. Worldwide, there are about a half-million cases of cervical cancer and 290 000 deaths annually; in Canada there are about 1350 new cases and 400 deaths annually. Women who receive the vaccine will still need annual Pap smears to detect other HPV strains. The vaccine is administered in 3 doses and is effective for between 5 and 10 years.

Health research funding: The Canadian Institutes of Health Research has awarded 1600 research grants worth over \$354 million — the largest amount in its 5-year history. Ontario researchers got 40% of the funding (\$138.5 million) and Quebec scientists got 31% (\$108.8 million).

ED wait info: Fifty-seven percent of patient visits to selected emergency departments in 2003–04 were for less-urgent or non-urgent conditions such as sore throats and sprained ankles, reports the Canadian Institute for Health Information. Only 0.5% of patients needed life-saving interventions. Most of the data in *Understanding Emergency Department Wait Times* is from Ontario hospitals; some is from British Columbia, Nova Scotia and Prince Ed-



ward Island. Researchers also found that half of these patients saw a physician in 51 minutes or less; 10% waited nearly 3 hours or more. See the report at www.cihi.ca

NYC v. trans fats: Heart disease is New York’s biggest killer, and the city is blaming trans fats. The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has asked city restaurants and other food services to avoid serving and cooking with foods that contain trans fats. Research shows that eating trans fats raises low-density lipoprotein, increasing the risk of heart disease. It is unclear how New York chefs will respond: about half of the city’s 20 000 restaurants use trans fats to prepare food, requiring a large-scale change in cooking and buying habits to meet the city’s request. — Sally Murray, *CMAJ*

Hospital admissions for mental illness: Patients with a primary diagnosis of mental illness accounted for 6% of the 2.8 million hospital stays in 2002–03, reports the Canadian Institute for Health Information. Another 9% of stays involved patients with a non-psychiatric primary diagnosis and associated mental illness, states CIHI’s new report: *Hospital Mental Health Services in Canada 2002–2003*. Altogether, these hospital stays accounted for one-third of total days patients spent in Canadian hospitals. The majority of these stays were related to mood disorders (34%), schizophrenic and psychotic disorders (21%) or substance-related disorders (14%). See the report at www.cihi.ca

Emergency contraception in India: Emergency contraception pills are now available over the counter at pharmacies without a doctor’s prescription in India. More than 200 countries, including Canada (*CMAJ* 2005;172:861–2) but not the US, have made a similar move. In China, women can get the pills through vending machines. India’s Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss said, “This is our way to help empower women in India.” — Compiled by Barbara Sibbald, *CMAJ*

DOI:10.1503/cmaj.051411

DOI:10.1503/cmaj.051369