



Victories claimed in tobacco wars

Antitobacco headlines have been prominent throughout North America in recent months. In Ottawa, the CMA and other health advocates claimed a partial victory when an unamended Bill C-71, the Tobacco Act, was granted Royal Assent in April. However, the lobby went on full alert when it was revealed that Health Minister David Dingwall had written Molstar Sports and Entertainment about amending the Tobacco Act to “respect the international standard concerning the use of logos on cars, drivers, pit crew and transport equipment.” The CMA and antitobacco advocates vowed to monitor the situation to ensure the intent of the bill is maintained and to guarantee that future regulations and amendments strengthen rather than weaken the legislation.

In the US, the tobacco giants appeared to be moving from their fight-at-all-costs stance in the face of potentially crippling lawsuits by states seeking compensation for



health care costs. In April the *Globe and Mail* reported that secret talks could lead to a trade-off in which the tobacco industry would

agree to severe advertising restrictions and establish a fund to cover medical costs in exchange for protection against future liability. More than 20 US states have launched lawsuits to recover billions of dollars in medical costs; the first trial is scheduled to start in July in Mississippi.

The apparent success of litigation in the US may spark similar action in Canada. In April British Columbia's health minister announced that the province planned to introduce legislation to make tobacco companies pay for health care costs associated with smoking, and a spokesperson for the Non-Smokers' Rights Association said several other provinces are considering similar action.

IMGs don't like rural life either

Like Canadian-trained physicians, international medical graduates (IMGs) practising in Newfoundland and Labrador say that remuneration and working conditions need to be improved if they are to be encouraged to stay in the province. In a survey conducted by the Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association (NLMA), 55% of IMGs said they were dissatisfied with working in the province; the reasons cited were income (45%), facilities/cutbacks (27%), and lifestyle and working hours (26%). Other concerns related to the lack of training opportunities and licensure requirements.

Writing in *Communiqué*, Bruce Squires, the NLMA's executive director, reported that universal concern about workload, lifestyle and compensation demonstrates the severity of the problems facing rural medicine and how vital it is to address them. However, he added, the intricacies of access to licensure and to additional postgraduate training are also of great concern to IMGs. Since Newfoundland relies heavily on IMGs to provide health care in isolated communities, their problems affect all physicians in the province and concern the NLMA.



**Health
Cuts
Hurt
Everyone**

Will Canadians' concern about health care be resolved when the votes in the June 2 federal election are counted? Absolutely not, says the CMA. Physicians must ensure that their new members of Parliament are fully aware of how reduced federal spending on medicare is crippling access to quality health care. Every physician can make a difference by contacting their newly elected MP to discuss health care issues. For information about CMA's grassroots lobbying initiative, the MD-MP Contact Program, call 800 682-MDMP.