



Don't abandon AIDS prevention, warns WHO

It is premature to suggest that HIV/AIDS will soon be a chronic, nonfatal disease even though triple therapies have shown impressive results in clinical trials, the World Health Organization says. Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima, WHO's director general, said a wave of optimism has enveloped the international AIDS community because of trials involving combinations of 3 antiretroviral

drugs, including a protease inhibitor.

However, the longest clinical trials with these therapies have lasted only 2 years. Nakajima said possible problems with resistance have not been clarified and at US\$1000 to \$1500 per month the therapy is beyond the financial means of many countries. While it offers real hope, he said, policy-makers must not abandon their commitment to prevention programs and the search for vaccines, microbicides and other effective preventive interventions.

Pearls of wisdom for MDs

These pearls of medical wisdom recently appeared in *MUNMED*, the newsletter of the Memorial University Faculty of Medicine. They appear here courtesy of Dr. Bill Eaton.

- What do you call a doctor who views x-rays by holding them up to the window? The defendant.
- Formal attire and black tie are not required dress at Sunday morning rounds, while jeans and a faded T-shirt might not be your best bet when

New lung, new look



Rose Land before. . .

Rose Land discovered a little recognized side effect of organ transplantation when she learned firsthand that recipients may get a new identity along with their new lease on life. Land, 43, of Fort Saskatchewan, Alta., received a lung transplant following damage caused by primary pulmonary hypertension. Specialists warned her that psychological adjustments would be required but no one predicted the dramatic effect her postsurgical corticosteroid medication would have. Land found that

she received a new face with her transplant — so new that she has passed her own brother on the street without being recognized.

"The doctors say you'll get a rounder face from steroids, but that's not the way I changed," she said. "I changed so dramatically that even my doctors did a double take when I saw them. And no one else knew who I was."

The mother of 3 children says she now looks like her 20-year-old daughter, Carmelle, and strangers assume they are sisters. After developing transplant-induced diabetes, she replaced her eyeglasses with contact lenses; steroidal and hormone-replacement medications caused her hair to thicken. She never realized the full extent of her "new look" until she attended a family party.

"My sister-in-law walked up to me, put out her hand and said, 'Hi, I'm Carol Land.' I looked up at her, stuck out my own hand and said, 'Hi, I'm Rose Land.'"

Land said her physical changes following the transplant "took a lot of dealing with." Attending banquets with her husband, friends would approach them and

ask him: "How is your wife doing?" The anonymity is complete: in the small city she's lived in for 20 years, neighbours walk right past her.

Land, whose prognosis is good, participated in a church service on Thanksgiving Day 1996. She opened with: "Hi. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Rose Land. And for those of you who do know me, my name is Rose Land." — *Lynne Sears Williams*



and after surgery



on the stand as a defendant. However, either may be acceptable for after-hours house calls or deliveries.

- Over the years I have saved thousands of dollars by listening to financial advice offered by colleagues — and ignoring it. Want to lose money? Buy into another doctor's business venture. Want to make money? Get that other doctor to buy into yours.
- Look after yourself: nobody else will. Take a nap. Go for a walk. Go home early. Try it 1 day next week and see if the whole world falls

apart. Perhaps it will, perhaps it won't. Once you've died from overwork, your appointment schedule will be empty for a long, long time.

Elder-abuse handbook launched

Canada's first handbook to help professionals and volunteers identify and deal with elder abuse has been developed by the Calgary-based Kerby Centre. *Golden Years — Hidden Fears: Elder Abuse* is a 125-page book that covers issues such as the characteris-

tics of abusers, assessment of elder abuse and useful agencies to help those who have been abused. Author Virginia Boyack works with seniors at the Kerby Centre, an agency developed to meet the needs of people over age 60. It is estimated that 4% of seniors experience abuse and the problem may worsen as the number of Canadians reaching old age grows. The book is available for \$24.95, including GST, shipping and handling, from the Kerby Centre, 1113 - 7th Ave. SW, Calgary, AB T2P 1B2; 403 265-0661, x328; (fax) 403 264-7047.

Research Update • Le point sur la recherche

House flies and *Helicobacter pylori*

Treatment of peptic ulcers has been revolutionized by the discovery that most ulcers are caused by *Helicobacter pylori* infection. The way this bacterium is transmitted remains unknown, however. Now researchers in Boston are looking at the possibility that the infection is spread by the humble house fly (*J Clin Microbiol* 1997;35(6):1300-3).

The researchers reasoned that house flies feed on excrement, which has been shown to contain *H. pylori* when people are infected. If the flies carry the bacterium and discharge it in their own excrement, people exposed to fly excrement could become infected.

House flies were allowed to feed on *H. pylori* grown on agar plates, then removed from the source of *H. pylori* for varying periods and subsequently dissected. The bacteria were isolated from the flies' external surfaces for up to 12 hours and from their guts and excreta for up to 30 hours after feeding. *Helicobacter*-like organisms were also found in the gut lumen and attached to intestinal epithelial cells. It appears to

be possible for house flies to become infected and spread the infection. — C.J. Brown

Genetic mutations and risk of breast cancer

Recently discovered genetic mutations play a major role in breast cancer in some families and ethnic groups, but the risk is not as high as previously thought. A series of articles in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (1997;336[20]) examines the risk of breast cancer associated with mutations in the *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* genes. In the first article, US researchers looked at 5318 subjects of Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry, since this ethnic group has a high (2%) rate of the genetic mutations. Among carriers of the mutations, the risk of breast cancer from family history was estimated at 56%, which is lower than previous estimates of up to 85%. In another article, researchers looked at the likelihood that women with a family history of breast cancer seen in breast-cancer-screening clinics had the *BRCA1* mutation. They found that most tests for the mutation, even in high-risk women, had negative results.

Another article investigated the rate of the 2 genetic mutations in women with early-onset breast cancer. The mutation in *BRCA2* was found to contribute to fewer cases of breast cancer in young women than the *BRCA1* mutation.

In the news . . .

Cracking the Spanish flu's genetic code

In 1918 Spanish influenza swept across the globe. It killed at least 20 million people, mainly young adults, in 1918-19. Now US scientists have isolated and characterized the virus that caused the epidemic from tissue samples taken from US servicemen who fell victim to the flu (*Science* 1997;275:1793-5). A H1N1 virus, the Spanish flu virus is distinct from all other strains. It appears to be closely related to early strains of swine flu and is grouped with human and swine, rather than bird and horse, strains. The proposed name for the strain is Influenza A/South Carolina/1/18 (H1N1).