



More than 1000 CMA members sign up with OSLER

In a surprisingly large growth spurt, more than 1000 physicians who belong to the CMA have signed up for the association's new database-searching service, OSLER (Ovid Search: Link to Electronic Resources). The service, which is free to members, is only 6 months old. It provides access to bibliographic databases such as MEDLINE, AIDSLINE, CancerLIT and HealthSTAR, and partici-

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Deidre Green, OSLER support librarian

pants get free assistance from the librarian at the CMA's OSLER-support desk, Deidre Green.

By mid-August 1065 doctors had registered for the service. "We're amazed we passed 1000 in such a short time," says Green, who is based in the CMA library. "People are joining at the rate of about 50 a week." An additional 579 members have requested activation codes, but have yet to use the service.

OSLER might be compared with a well-lighted, 4-lane highway that provides clear directions to drivers. It allows physicians quick and easy access to the latest medical literature from their offices, making it an invaluable tool for supporting evidence-based medicine.

Dr. Gerard Evans of Kitchener, Ont., registered with OSLER in

April and uses it regularly to research things he comes across during professional reading or in the mass media. "I would certainly recommend it," he says. Evans also appreciates having a librarian handy — he has contacted Green 4 times for help with a search.

Green also offers phone advice to novice users who are unsure on how to search, and the library will soon offer CME credit courses on searching OSLER. These will run in Ottawa this fall and winter, and elsewhere if funding is available.

To obtain registration codes for OSLER, call 888 855-2555. Questions and comments are always welcome at the OSLER support desk. Send email messages to cmalibrary@sympatico.ca or call 800 663-7336, x2255. — *Barbara Sibbald*

Hepatitis A and C "superinfection" tackled in BC

British Columbia hopes to head off cases involving a deadly combination of 2 viruses by launching a hepatitis A vaccination program for intravenous drug users and others infected with hepatitis C. The program was prompted by a recent Italian study in which one-third of patients infected with both hepatitis A and C died of liver damage (*N Engl J Med* 1998;338:286-90). The results "were not a surprise," says Dr. Arlene King, director of epidemiology at the BC Centre for Disease Control. Anecdotal evidence had suggested that immunization against hepatitis A should be considered for patients with hepatitis C. One BC resident has died because of the "superinfection" this year, and 6 deaths were reported between 1990

and 1997. By mid-August the centre was tracking 52 reported cases, but under-reporting is suspected.

Because of the overwhelming prevalence of hepatitis C among intravenous drug users in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, the dual infection could result in "potentially a very explosive situation," says Dr. Liz Whynot, medical health officer for the area. She commends the health ministry for acting before a crisis developed. BC will be the first province to offer the free vaccinations, which cost about \$50 per person. Hepatitis A has been spreading at double the normal rate in Vancouver since last fall.

More than 25 000 BC residents are known to have hepatitis C, and up to 10 000 of them are thought to

be intravenous drug users. Infection with either virus is reportable, and King says that the province's surveillance system is "one of the best in the country." She predicts 6000 to 8000 new cases of hepatitis A will be reported in 1998. Implementing the vaccination program for people who acquired hepatitis C from differing causes has made the task "one of the most challenging ever put in place."

The effort will be concentrated initially in the Downtown Eastside, where immunization will be available at needle exchanges and through mobile clinics and health units. The BC Centre for Disease Control is still developing promotional strategies to reach eligible people in other parts of the province. — © *Heather Kent*