



## Reduced activity days a way of life in BC

Reduced activity days (RADs), during which doctors close their offices in order to reduce their billings to the provincial government, are now part of the monthly medical calendar in British Columbia. Dr. Jim Lane, president of the British Columbia Medical Association, recently announced that a schedule of 2 RAD days each month will continue into 1999. The BCMA is advising patients to seek alternative care at hospital emergency departments. Many walk-in clinics are also available on Saturdays, although most are closing on the RAD days.

The impact on emergency rooms in the Lower Mainland appears to have been minor, especially in Vancouver. Dr. Kendall Ho, clinical assistant professor in the Division of Emergency Medicine at UBC, says the RADs' impact at the Vancouver General Hospital has been largely "psychological. We don't see a significantly huge increase [in patients]." The situation is similar at St. Paul's Hospital, which serves Vancouver's downtown core. "We have not seen a whole lot of evidence that we are inordinately busy," says Dr. Eric Grafstein, acting chair in the Department of Emergency Medicine. St. Paul's emergency room is busiest in the summer when tourists flood the city. Grafstein says seasonal variations have a far greater impact on patient numbers than RADs.

However, Grafstein says waiting-list times are aggravated by the RADs, and "not being able to see a general practitioner pales in comparison to increased waiting list times." Linda Bartz, director of communications at the Vancouver General Hospital, agrees; although extra staff have not been needed in the emergency room, postponement of elective surgery because of RADs adds 120

patients a day to waiting lists.

In the suburban Simon Fraser health region, Eagle Ridge Hospital handled double the usual volume of patients on the two RADs immediately before the August holiday weekend. However, many patients apparently came with minor ailments. Spokesperson Helen Carkner says that balancing the cost savings of cancelled surgery against the cost of extra staffing for emergency rooms presents more of a challenge than the

RADs themselves. Meanwhile, doctors' offices are busier immediately following RADs.

The Ministry of Health says it has no plans to meet the doctors to discuss the closures. Spokeswoman Stephanie Slater calls the actions "unfortunate and inappropriate," and says the ministry is "keeping its eyes and ears out to monitor major problems. We don't have a lot of avenues open to us — doctors have the right to take days off." — © Heather Kent

### Cool sites

[www.foodallergy.org/](http://www.foodallergy.org/)

Most physicians have patients with food allergies, real or imagined, and this is a good site to which to refer them; you may even learn something yourself. The Food Allergy Network promotes itself as a nonprofit organization established to help families living with food allergies and to increase public awareness about these allergies and anaphylaxis. Its Web site is designed to educate and help people cope with their allergies. From it I learned that 90% of food allergies are caused by 8 foods — milk, eggs, wheat, peanuts, soy, tree nuts, fish and shellfish. The site also states that although some people believe up to 25% of adults have food allergies, the real incidence is closer to 1% to 2%. The site has answers to FAQs, such as the difference between wheat allergy and celiac disease. A research section had a report from the *New England Journal of Medicine* that describes a patient who had experienced an allergic reaction to peanut after receiving a liver-kidney transplant from a donor who was allergic to peanuts. A Product Alert section had information on the status of EpiPens, which were recently subject to a recall, and there's a toll-free number for ordering milk-free Hershey chocolate bars. Finally, many links are listed to other sites that deal with the problem of food allergies. This site can be a valuable resource for patients who are learning to live with their disorder. Heck, I may even order that Hershey bar. I just hope it tastes better than the gluten-free bread I tried. — Dr. Robert Patterson, [robpatterson@email.msn.com](mailto:robpatterson@email.msn.com)

