

Patient's choice: Doctor or nurse practitioner?

For the first time, Nova Scotia is to begin using nurse practitioners outside the tertiary care setting. The nurses are the cornerstone of new primary care projects about to begin in 4 rural communities.

Health Minister Jamie Muir stresses that nurse practitioners will work closely with doctors and will not be allowed to prescribe experimental or controlled drugs. "The pilot projects are going to be an integrated system. There will be a physician or a nurse practitioner, and other people as well. So it won't be like the nurse practitioner is in an office at one end of town and the physician is way down at the other end of town. The nurse practitioners are not going to be making pro-

found diagnoses and then acting as though they were fully qualified medical doctors."

As well, patients who are uncomfortable with NPs can choose to see a physician instead, says Harriet McCready, director of primary care in the provincial Department of Health. "Nobody is going to force a patient to do one thing or another."

In addition, she notes, doctors and nurse practitioners can refer patients to each other, with problems beyond the scope of the nurse practitioner being addressed by a physician. Likewise, if there is a procedure that needs to be done and could be done easily by a nurse practitioner, the doctor might suggest this to a patient.

In order to allow for the use of NPs in Nova Scotia, the Pharmacy Act was amended to allow nurses to prescribe certain drugs, including birth control pills and blood pressure medication. The new legislation will remain in force for 3 years while the primary care pilot projects are running. If the projects prove successful, the Pharmacy Act could be amended to allow for the ongoing use of NPs in the province, the health minister says.

In addition to nurse practitioners, the four primary care projects, funded primarily by Health Canada at a cost of \$2.85 million, involve developing new computerized information systems and new payment options for physicians. — *Donalee Moulton, Halifax*

Censoring breast cancer in San Francisco

San Francisco has been scandalized — by a health awareness campaign. The city, which barely flinched when the local zoo offered \$40 "viewings" of mating animals on Valentine's Day, was rocked by bus shelter posters depicting provocatively posed women with mastectomy scars.

Transit authorities in Santa Clara County pulled all 17 advertisements there after receiving complaints in late January. Another 4 posters were removed in the East Bay. The company with exclusive rights to bus shelter advertising within the City of San Francisco initially agreed to accept the ads, but changed its mind when it saw them. "I looked away," the company's local director told the San Francisco Examiner, referring to a poster that parodied a Cosmopolitan magazine cover.

The ads were developed by the

Breast Cancer Fund, an 8-year-old national nonprofit group (www.breastcancerfund.org) based in San Francisco, which has one of the highest breast cancer rates in the world. Designed to resemble a Cosmopolitan cover, a Victoria's Secret catalog and a Calvin Klein perfume ad, the posters all show professional models with mastectomy scars superimposed on their chests.

The scars belong to Andrea Martin, the Breast Cancer Fund's 53-year-old founder and executive director. "The models, advertising executive and photographer donated their time. I donated images of my mastectomy scars," says Martin, a former lawyer and restaurateur who underwent mastectomies in 1989 and 1991.

The ads are intended to depict America's obsession with breasts as symbols of nurture and sexuality, point-

ing out the deadly, disfiguring effects of breast cancer. By early March, the Breast Cancer Fund had received thousands of letters and emails about the campaign, 80% of which supported the ads, Martin said.

In Canada, the ads provoked mixed responses among breast cancer survivors contacted by *CMAJ*. Karen DeKoning, president of the Canadian Breast Cancer Network, found some of the ads objectionable. "Using a photo of a woman's scars to make a point is acceptable, but bringing sex into the picture to me is prostituting the woman for the cause," said DeKoning, who emphasized that she was speaking as a survivor, not on behalf of her group. A member of her board, Lynn Macdonald of Kelowna, BC, supported the ads. "Some people may be offended," Macdonald said, "but the realities of breast cancer, when they hit home, are severe, devastating and in some cases deadly."

While many of the bus shelter posters were removed, another outdoor advertising company offered free billboard space to the Breast Cancer Fund. — *David Hekwig, London, Ontario*

