

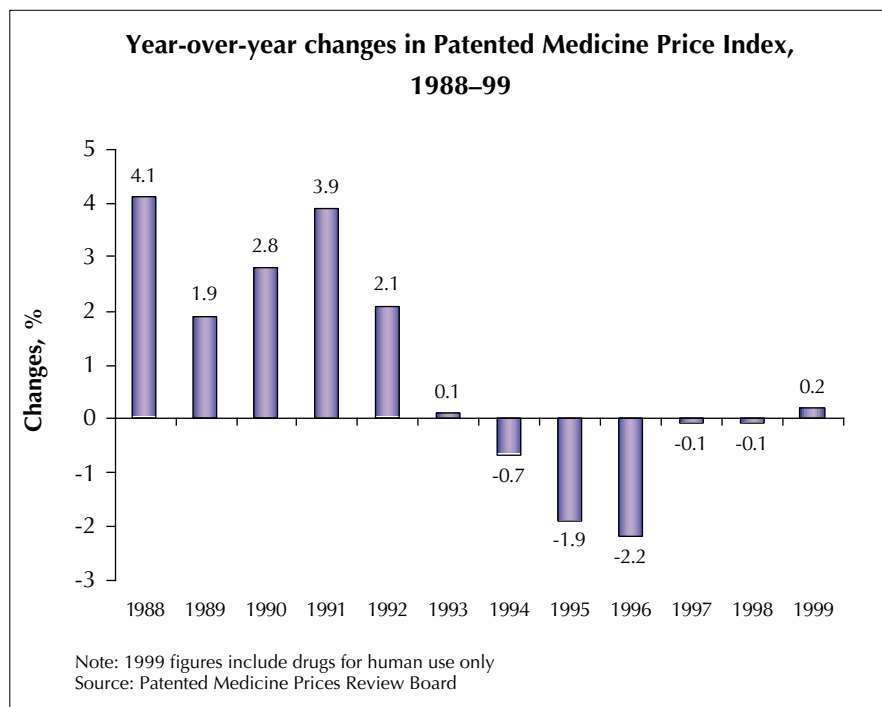
## Pulse

### Drug price index sees first increase in 5 years

After 5 years of decreasing prices, the Patented Medicine Price Index (PMPI) showed an increase of 0.2% in 1999. The last increase was recorded in 1993, when prices rose by 0.1%. In 1999, Canada's Consumer Price Index registered an increase of 1.7%. The PMPI, which includes only drugs used by humans, measures the average change from the previous year in the average transaction prices of patented drug products sold in Canada. The data are collected by the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board, an independent federal tribunal that has a mandate to ensure that prices of patented medicines are not excessive.

A Statistics Canada index that tracks all pharmaceuticals (both patented and nonpatented) showed a 0.8% price increase for 1999. This Canadian result can be compared with that from a similarly constructed index in the United States that, for the same period, recorded an increase of 3.7%.

Drugs as a percentage of all health expenditures continue to rise steadily, reaching a level of 15.2% in 1999. Factors that affect total spending on drugs include changes in total population,



changes in utilization of drugs per patient and new types of treatment.

In 1999, patented drugs accounted for 61% of all drugs sold in Canada. Another 30% of sales involved non-patented brand-name drugs, with the

remaining 9% of sales accounted for by generic drugs. At the end of 1999, manufacturers' total sales of drugs for humans stood at \$8.9 billion in Canada, a 16.8% increase from 1998. — *Lynda Buske, buskel@cma.ca*

### Medical school enrolment to increase at UBC

Enrolment at the University of British Columbia's medical school could increase modestly by as soon as next year and eventually expand by as much as half of the current total, the province reports. The existing intake of 120 students has remained unchanged since 1980; it is the smallest intake per capita among provinces that have medical schools. Dr. John Cairns, UBC's dean of medicine, hopes that a significant increase in enrolment will be achieved within the next 5 years.

The increase was announced by provincial health minister Mike Farnworth. A formula for increased funding for residents is also planned for 2001. Cairns said the long-discussed need to expand the medical school has been recognized "at last." He said the school's limited enrolment meant the province was "choosing to educate only 25% of

the physicians it requires. ... There have been severe problems in a number of communities around the province, and we all recognize that they are going to get much worse. The province can't rely on other provinces as it has and it can't rely on other countries as it has."

The medical school is working out the financial details of the expansion, which it plans to present to the provincial government in early fall. The federal government has not made a commitment to contribute to the expansion. Cairns says Ottawa "must step up to the plate. The federal government has not taken a leadership role in medical education since the 1960s."

The new funding will include capital spending on the medical school's deteriorating and overcrowded physical facilities. — *Heather Kent, Vancouver*