example, the July 1996 and January 2000 editions of the Adverse Drug Reaction Newsletter provided safety information on cisapride.1,2

The only TPP-approved information on drugs in Canada is provided in the product monograph. The TPP is revising the format and content requirements for product monographs; one component of the new monographs will be specific, Canadian patient information that could be provided when a product is prescribed or dispensed. On the basis of public consultations on the product monograph held in September 2000 (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpb-dgps/therapeut/htmleng/consult_monograph.html), we are planning to electronically post product monographs in both official languages.

Health Canada recognizes the importance of communicating risk information concerning therapeutic products to health care professionals and consumers alike. I therefore urge CMAJ readers to consult our Web site to familiarize themselves with the progress on our initiative to improve the format and content of product monographs and to make their contents available to the Canadian public.

Robert G. Peterson
Director General
Therapeutic Products Programme
Health Products and Food Branch
Health Canada
Ottawa, Ont.

References

Fifty years at Western

I appreciated the lists of University of Western Ontario medical school students from 1954 and 2004 that you published in your 2000 holiday issue.1 The changes that have taken place over the 50 years are obvious: we now have a larger number of students, more female students and a greater ethnic mix within the student body. These differences reflect not only the increasingly multicultural nature of Canadian society but also the changing attitudes toward who should be admitted to medical school.

Women now account for 50% of Canada’s medical students, compared with 5% from our class of 1954. It is worth noting that women were not accepted in any Canadian medical school just over 100 years ago.

Similarly, our schools now welcome candidates who reflect the ethnic spectrum of the population, and this range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds enriches everybody and helps ensure that our graduates will understand and respond appropriately to diversity within their patient population.

However, increased recognition of the value of inclusiveness in Canadian medical schools in no way detracts from the class of 1954, whose members have provided committed service and leadership to their profession for so many years.

Carol P. Herbert
Dean
Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry
University of Western Ontario
London, Ont.

Reference
1. Fifty years at the University of Western Ontario. CMAJ 2000;163(1):1581.

Clinical examination for carpal tunnel syndrome

Thenar wasting is not mentioned in the CMAJ clinical update on carpal tunnel syndrome.1 However, it may be obvious on one or both sides — particularly in elderly people — and it can even reduce the thenar bulk of the heavy laborer’s typically more muscular dominant side so that it matches that of the other side. Thenar wasting is associated with detectable loss of muscle power. These signs are common, reliable and easily elicited at the bedside.

Alex MacIntyre
Physician (retired)
Alliston, Ont.

Reference

Submitting letters

Letters may be submitted via our Web site or by mail, courier, email (pubs@cma.ca) or fax. They should be no more than 300 words long and must be signed by all authors. A signed copy of letters submitted by email must be sent subsequently to CMAJ by fax or regular mail. Letters written in response to an article published in CMAJ must be submitted within 2 months of the article’s publication date. CMAJ corresponds only with the authors of accepted letters. Letters are subject to editing and abridgement.

eLetters

We encourage readers to submit letters to the editor via the eLetters service on our Web site (www.cma.ca/cmaj). Our aim is to post by the next business day correspondence that contributes significantly to the topic under discussion. eLetters will be appended to the article in question in eCMAJ and will also be considered for print publication in CMAJ. Beginning with the Aug. 22, 2000, issue, eLetters can be submitted by clicking on the mailbox icon at the end of the HTML text of any eCMAJ article.
agnosis, an assumption the authors of the original article themselves admit is flawed.

Myers extracts the recommendation that “decreased pain sensation in the median nerve distribution is the most helpful finding in making the diagnosis.” This finding will only help to diagnose advanced carpal tunnel syndrome, in which the patient’s sensation at rest is impaired. Use of this finding will indeed increase the specificity of the examiner’s results but will seriously decrease the sensitivity of the clinical examination. If practitioners follow this guideline they will grossly underdiagnose carpal tunnel syndrome and will exclude many patients who would benefit from treatment.

Recent studies point to the carpal compression test as the most reliable and valid physical examination test for the diagnosis of carpal tunnel syndrome. The goal in recommending a clinical examination technique for the diagnosis of a disorder is both high specificity and sensitivity, and the carpal compression test is a markedly better way to achieve this goal than assessment of median nerve pain threshold.

Timothy J. Best
Hand and plastic surgeon
Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.

References
3. Marx RG, Bombardier C, Wright JG. What do we know about the reliability and validity of physical examination tests used to examine the upper extremity? J Hand Surg 1999;24A:185-93.

You say statistics, I say statististics

May be an old fussbudget, but the advertisement for the editorial fellowship on page 1148 of the Nov. 28, 2000, issue of CMAJ would have had more impact if “statistics” had been spelled correctly — especially as the 1998 Fellow said in the ad that she had learned about copyediting during her year with the journal. Having recently moved to Australia I enjoy reading CMAJ, but I could not resist a wee note to keep the copyediting division up to speed.

Ron Benzie
Director
Department of Perinatal Ultrasound Wentworth Area Health Service Penrith, NSW Australia

[Editors’ note:]

Our faces are red with embarrassment...

Email use by physicians

After reading the news item by Shelley Martin about the results of the 2000 Physician Resource Questionnaire and reviewing the additional statistics on the CMA Web site, I suspect that there is bias in the statistics about computer use by Canadian physicians.

In Alberta, 49.5% of physicians have a known email address, according to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta and the Alberta Medical Association. This is 22.6% lower than the 72.1% figure quoted for email use among Canadian physicians in the “Internet use” section of the Physician Resource Questionnaire statistics. I simply do not believe that Alberta physicians are that far below the national average in their use of computers.

I suspect that, as in past surveys, many respondents who do not use computers left the computer questions blank, rather than answering No. If such records were not used when calculating the overall percentages, the percentage of computer users would be falsely high. This might be due in part to the fact that the computer questions appeared at the end of a long questionnaire. I respectfully suggest that the survey analysts compare their email usage figures with membership data from each provincial college of physicians and medical association.

Barrie McCombs
Director
Medical Information Service
University of Calgary Calgary, Alta.

References
1. Martin S. Almost all physicians have embraced computer use, survey shows. CMAJ 2000;163(8):1042.

[The author responds:]

As in past surveys, the denominator in the calculation of the proportion of physicians who use computers and who use email is equal to the total number of physicians who completed the survey. All records, including those in which the physician left the email or the computer question or both blank, were used when calculating the overall percentages.

Shelley Martin
Physician Survey Analyst
Canadian Medical Association
Ottawa, Ont.

Reference

Correction

In Table 3 of a recent CMAJ article by Ruhee Chaudhry and colleagues, the 95% confidence interval for the 5-year survival rate for patients with a median neighbourhood family income less than $45 000 who were initially seen in a teaching hospital should read 85.3–94.6, not 95.3–94.6.

Reference