

Neurologists warn about link between chiropractic, stroke

More than 60 Canadian neurologists have issued a statement warning that chiropractic neck manipulation can cause stroke and death. The neurologists and the Canadian Stroke Consortium caution that chiropractic manipulation involving the neck can cause arterial dissection. They make 6 recommendations and call for a ban on manipulations involving infants and children. "If there are no clear benefits, any risk is unacceptable," says Calgary neurologist Brad Stewart.

But Jim Duncan, executive director of the Canadian Chiropractic Association, says that neck manipulations help relieve chronic back pain and migraine, and chiropractors have "an enviable safety record" in providing such treatments. The stroke consortium says that 1 in 5000 to 10 000 strokes is caused by neck manipulation. In Canada, about 100 cases of arterial dissection are linked to neck manipulation each year. A recent *CMAJ* report (2002;166[1]:40-1) indicated that the incidence is likely vastly underreported, largely because the link is seldom made between the neck adjustments and stroke.

Dr. Murray Katz, a Montreal pediatrician and vocal opponent of chiropractic manipulation involving children, says warning signs of vascular accidents, such as neck pain, visual impairment, nausea,

dizziness and numbness, often don't appear until a week or 2 after the chiropractic visit, and some victims don't understand the severity and don't seek medical treatment.

The neurologists, including the chiefs of neurology at Canada's teaching hospitals, are urging physicians to question patients with stroke symptoms — especially those under 45 years — about recent neck manipulation. They say Canadians need to know that the symptoms are not normal and "that under no circumstances should individuals allow their necks to be manipulated if any of these symptoms are present."

The news release says neck manipulation is one of the leading causes of stroke in people under 45 years. A recent study by researchers from the Institute of Clinical Evaluative Sciences in Ontario found that patients younger than 45 who had experienced stroke related to posterior circulation are 5 times more likely than controls to have visited a chiropractor within a week of the event (*Stroke* 2001;32:1054-60). "No one knows who is most susceptible to strokes caused by manipulation," says Katz. "So chiropractors shouldn't be doing them until more studies are done and risks can be assessed on a per patient basis."

The neurologists also want chiropractors to post warning signs, but Dun-

can says patients already sign consent forms and are made aware of the risks of neck manipulation by chiropractors, including the "slight risk of stroke." — *Jennifer Jones, Ottawa*

Doping rears its ugly head at Winter Games

Doping is the greatest danger threatening sport and a direct attack on the health of athletes, the president of International Olympic Committee (IOC) says. Dr. Jacques Rogge, an orthopedic surgeon from Belgium, says it's time for the sports community to "wake up to this terrible danger."

To this end, the policing role of the independent World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) was expanded for the 2002 Winter Games. For the first time, WADA received test results for medal winners at the same time as Olympic officials and before any sanctions were imposed. Twelve WADA observers with expertise in doping control monitored every stage of drug testing. At the 2000 Sydney Olympics, 15 WADA observers monitored 35 sports and 4 times as many athletes.

The additional transparency is designed to counter accusations that the IOC has not been serious about combating the use of performance-enhancing drugs, and even that it had covered up positive tests at past Olympics in order to protect the Games' reputation.

Rogge, who says doping has reached "unacceptable levels," pledged the IOC's total support of WADA, the third-party agency founded 2 years ago to combat drug use in sport.

WADA also introduced a voluntary doping passport at the Games, which records test results during an athlete's career. Fifty athletes signed up in the Olympic Village within hours of its launch. Athletes who register at www.wadapassport.org provide contact information and details of their whereabouts, thus demonstrating their willingness to be tested anytime and anywhere. — *Janet Rae Brooks, Salt Lake City*

MD's \$2.5-million libel award upheld

Dr. Frans Leenen's battle with the CBC is finally over. In February the Supreme Court of Canada denied the broadcaster leave to appeal a lower-court ruling awarding Leenen almost \$2.5 million in libel damages, costs and interest, the most in Canadian history (see *CMAJ* 2000;162[12]:1735-6). When the case was launched in 1996, Leenen had been willing to settle it for \$10 000 and an apology.

It centred on the depiction of Leenen, director of the Hypertension Unit at the University of Ottawa Heart Institute, on an investigative program, *the fifth estate*. It dealt with the safety of a calcium-channel blocker, nifedipine, and Leenen's association with it. In the original 2000 ruling, the judge wrote: "In order to portray [Leenen] in the role of the 'bad guy' and in order to disparage his views, the CBC took an eminent research scientist, whom they knew to be a person of high integrity and reputation, and presented him as a devious, dishonest, bumbling fool in order to advance the story line."

Leenen is glad the case is finally over. "I will now be able to get on with my life and put this sorry chapter behind me," he said. "I'll leave it to others in the media, in academia, in law — and perhaps in government — to deal with what I believe should be a crisis of conscience for the CBC and *the fifth estate*." — *Patrick Sullivan, CMAJ*