

## CMA frowns on prescribing rights for pharmacists

The Pharmacists Association of Alberta (PAA) says its members should be granted expanded powers to prescribe medication, but the CMA is less than enthusiastic about the idea.

The PAA wants the province to give Alberta's 3054 pharmacists prescriptive authority within 18 months. "If a pharmacist is practising in a certain environment where [she has] a relationship with the patient and the patient's physician and [has] the appropriate facilities and information, [she] would be allowed to prescribe drugs," said Trudy Holzmann, the PAA president. "With 5 years of university study, pharmacists have by far the most drug education. It makes sense that they be involved in drug therapy decisions."

The push for the new powers started as a discussion at a conference 3 years ago, but gained momentum after submissions for health reform concerning the province's Health Professions Act were requested last year.

"Pharmacists have been ranked by the public in many surveys as the most trusted health care professionals," said Holzmann. "We just want to ensure that patients get the best drug therapy for their situation, and we feel that that will translate into lower costs."

CMA President Dana Hanson is skeptical. "The CMA does not agree with pharmacists having the right to prescribe," he said. "We feel very strongly that this is not in the patient's

## CIHR honours "cutting-edge" researchers

Dr. K.S. Joseph, an associate editor at *CMAJ* for 4 years before he left to pursue a research career at Dalhousie University 18 months ago, is 1 of 5 Canadian researchers to receive major awards from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

Joseph, an associate professor of perinatal epidemiology at Dalhousie, received the Peter Loughheed/CIHR New Investigator Award during a Nov. 20 ceremony in Toronto. It "is given to Canada's brightest young health researchers at the beginning of their careers."

The other recipients were:

- **Dr. Anthony Pawson** (Samuel Lunenfeld Research Institute, Mount Sinai Hospital, Toronto) — Michael Smith Prize in Health Research, which recognizes innovation, creativity, leadership and dedication to health research.

- **Dr. Janet Rossant** (Samuel Lunenfeld Research Institute) and **Dr. Samy Suissa** (Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal) — CIHR Distinguished Investigator awards, which honour outstanding work by Canadian researchers recognized as international leaders in their fields.

- **Dr. Jean Shoveller** (Centre for Community Health and Health Evaluation Research, University of British Columbia) — Dorothy J. Lamont Scientist Award, which honours excellence in the field of cancer control research.

Joseph's research topics include the perinatal effects of delayed childbirth. His award is worth \$525 000 — \$275 000 in salary support over the next 5 years and \$250 000 in an unencumbered research allowance over the next 3 years. He said the award will give his career a "very important" boost. "I'm [also] hoping that it will make me a little more contemplative." CIHR President Alan Bernstein says the awards "are synonymous with exceptional, internationally recognized, cutting-edge research." — *Patrick Sullivan, CMAJ*



Joseph: one of "Canada's brightest young health researchers"

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best interest. There is a very definite set of skills that are refined and honed before a physician can enter practice, and pharmacists do not have this."

Hanson says that while pharmacists offer convenience, they cannot replace a physician's multidisciplinary services. "One has to put the patient first. If you come into your pharmacy and you've got a cough, is the pharmacist going to take off your shirt and listen to your chest?"

"We're not saying that there isn't an important role for pharmacists in a collaborative setting — there is. But there is a very firm line that has to be drawn with prescribing."

Jeff Poston, executive director of the Canadian Pharmacists Association, says prescribing powers would be a natural extension of the pharmacist's role. He said they already have prescriptive authority for some drugs, such as those containing codeine.

As well, pharmacists in 3 provinces have already been allowed to prescribe emergency birth control, such as the morning-after pill, and pharmacists in some US states are allowed to administer vaccinations. In the UK, it was recently proposed that pharmacists and nurses be given "supplementary prescribing" rights for select drugs.

"This is part of a global trend," said Poston, "and that's because it has the potential to take a huge load off family physicians. There's already a wide degree of leeway that some physicians give pharmacists to change some of their prescriptions, and we just want to build on those relationships. It's a matter of legislation catching up to practical realities."

The Alberta proposal came as Roy Romanow prepared to release his report on medicare. The report devoted an entire chapter — 21 pages — to prescription drugs, and another chapter to primary care reform, including the relationship between pharmacists and physicians. — *Brad Mackay, Toronto*