

Only (male) children all: In 1979, when the baby boom pushed the population beyond the 1 billion mark, China put some teeth into family planning with the 1-child-per-couple policy. Now, 20 years later, the policy has reduced China's population by 250 million, but the results are not all positive. Although it has helped to reduce the population of the world's most populous nation, it is reviled as a tool for human rights abuses, abortion of female fetuses and infanticide. And then there's the resultant imbalance, with an estimated 40 million single men by 2020, all looking in vain for wives. This disparity could constitute a serious threat to society, not to mention a rise in the abduction of women and prostitution. — *Anne Johnson, London*



Lei Zhang

AIDS strategy funding: Its funding has been frozen for 11 years, but the Canadian AIDS Strategy received no boost in the federal budget and activists charge that the federal government is choosing to administer the AIDS epidemic rather than fight it. With an average of 4000 new HIV/AIDS infections a year, Canada's infection rate is twice that of Australia and Britain, yet AIDS Strategy money for research, services and prevention has been held to \$42.2 million since 1993, notes Ralf Jürgens of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. Last year, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health concluded funding should be hiked to \$100-million a year. The AIDS strategy is being folded into the new federal Public Health Agency, which means "at a time when we need action and leadership to fight AIDS, the focus for at least a year will be on setting up a new bureaucracy," Jürgens said. — *Ann Silversides, Toronto*

Witt fights back: Health authorities in Saskatoon will examine the charts of 88 emergency room patients who died within 48 hours to determine if physician understaffing contributed to their deaths. The list of patients was provided by Dr. Jon Witt, the former director of emergency medicine at Royal University Hospital. Witt was demoted after writing to the minister of health to say that patients may have died or suffered irreparably because of long waiting times. Witt said none of the

88 patients were seen within nationally accepted time frames. In April, Witt's supporters held a rally at the hospital gates to demand his reinstatement, and to call for legislative protection for health care workers who blow the whistle on unsafe patient care. "This is about medicare and free speech and the ability to speak up when there's something wrong going on," said Witt, who continues to work as an emergency physician. — *Amy Jo Ebman, Saskatoon*

Sikh benefits: He's done it 6 times, including last year in Toronto, but this year in London's Flora Marathon on April 18th, he wants to break the 6-hour mark — and he's 93! Originally from Punjab in India, Fauja Singh moved to England 11 years ago when his wife died. He took up running as a kind of therapy, but it soon became a passion, and he ran his first marathon when he was 89. He does it for charity and to raise the profile of Sikhs. This year's run will be his last, he says. But he may be lured out of retirement to trounce the world record for the oldest person to run a marathon: 98. — *Anne Johnson, London*

Road safety is no accident: Each year road crashes kill 1.2 million people and injure or dis-

able up to 50 million more. The *World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention*, from WHO and the World Bank, states that much can be done to reduce this toll. "The risks can be understood and therefore can be prevented," said Dr. Jong-Wook Lee. "It's a question of political will." Proven measures include improving vehicle and road design, legislating and enforcing the use of seat-belts, helmets and child restraints, as well as publicizing the dangers of speeding and impaired driving. The report recommends that every country appoint a lead agency to coordinate efforts. Road crashes are the second leading cause of death worldwide among young people aged 5 to 29, and the third leading cause of death among people aged 33 to 44 years. Ninety percent of the deaths occur in the poorer countries. Without immediate action, road traffic deaths will rise by 80% in low- and middle-income countries by 2020. WHO devoted World Health Day 2004 (April 7) to road safety. — *Compiled by Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*



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