News @ a glance

Stay granted in Chaoulli decision:

The Supreme Court has stayed, for 1 year, its judgment striking down the province's ban on private health insurance. Quebec, supported by Ottawa, had argued that the ruling in the Chaoulli case was complex and implementing it could throw the delivery of medical services in Quebec into disarray. The had wanted an 18-month stay. A BC group representing private medical clinics opposed any stay, contending that Quebecers and other Canadians could be seriously harmed by delay. Cambie Surgeries of Vancouver and 7 other private, for-profit clinics cited a 90% increase in waiting times across the country. Their brief does not provide a source for those figures. Canada does not yet have a system to measure national waiting times.

Bacterial infection in China:

Epidemiologists in southwest China are investigating a bacterial infection that killed 38 people among a total of 206 infected, as of August 5. The farmers and others had all handled sick or dead pigs in June and July. Symptoms included high fever, nausea, fatigue and bruising. The World Health Organization urged people to stay calm, adding that the disease is not transmissible human-to-human. "I can assure you that the disease is absolutely not SARS, anthrax

or bird flu," Zeng Huajin, a Sichuan health official, told the *China Daily* newspaper. Chinese experts say the illness may be *Streptococcus suis* serotype 2.

Retailers butt out: More tobacco retailers are refusing to sell to youth aged 15-19. The Retailers' Behavior Toward Certain Youth Access-to-Tobacco Restrictions survey indicates that in 2004, 82% of retailers refused to sell cigarettes to underage youth aged 15-19, compared with 68% in 2003. The survey, published on Health Canada's Web site, shows the biggest improvement came in Quebec. However, Health Canada points out that about half of all underage smokers get family or friends to buy their cigarettes, or find retailers who will sell to them. Teams comprised of 1 adult and 1 minor conducted research for the survey by trying to buy cigarettes at 5516 stores in 30 cities. — *Laura Eggertson, CMAJ.*

Breast cancer wait times: The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that the Quebec government won't be named in a potentially massive lawsuit by women who say they had to wait too long for postsurgery radiation treatment at 12 Quebec hospitals. The women, who have already won the right to sue the hospitals for psychological and physical damage, wanted to add the Quebec government to their class-action suit. The Supreme Court refused to hear their request. The suit was launched by Anahit Cilinger, who waited 3 months for treatment in Montréal before going to Turkey, where she paid for the treatment herself. The Quebec courts previously stated that patients should not have to wait more than 8 weeks for radiation treatment after breast cancer surgery. Cilinger said she was surprised by the Supreme Court's ruling, given

its decision in the seminal Chaoulli case June 9 which affirmed Quebecers' right to timely care under the province's Charter of Rights.

Blindness risk: Health Canada is warning men taking sildenafil (Viagra, Cialis or Levitra) for erectile dysfunction to seek medical attention immediately if they experience vision problems. The warning comes after 2 reports in Canada of patients who experienced visual impairment while using Viagra. Health Canada is investigating a possible causal relationship. "It is difficult to determine whether the use of Viagra, Cialis or Levitra is causing NAION [nonarteritic anterior ischemic optic neuropathy], as individuals who have erectile problems often have high blood pressure, diabetes or other conditions that put them at increased risk," stated Health Canada. The department has asked for more safety data from the manufacturers.

Bristling BBQs: A doctor at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children wants an industry review of wire brushes and other barbecue utensils after the hospital removed broken-off bristles from the throats of 3 patients this summer. The bristles can be left on the grill after people use brushes to scrub away grease and food. Dr. Paolo Campisi, an ENT specialist, says in one case, a chunk of metal from a brush's bristle perforated a youth's esophagus and was floating in a capsule of pus between the carotid artery and the jugular vein. "It doesn't occur every day, but the potential complications of such an ingestion are very serious," Campisi told *The Canadian Press*. "If we can avoid another child going through the same experience, then we should warn the public." — *Compiled by Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*

DOI:10.1503/cmaj.050951

Art Explosion