

mins and mineral nutrients, including products that are readily available in other countries.”

Background Health Canada documents indicate the department doesn't consider the move a health risk, although some vitamins and minerals can produce adverse effects if consumed in excessive quantities.

“Discretionary fortification, the optional addition of any nutrient from a defined list of vitamins and minerals over defined ranges at the discretion of manufacturers, is expanded to allow for a wider range of fortified products which would provide for more food sources of nutrients without increased risk to health,” the department states (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/vitamin/faqs-eng.php).

Focus group testing also indicates that fortification would not lead to increased consumption of junk foods, Health Canada added. “Those who already consume ice cream or carbonated beverages

indicated that they might choose the fortified counterpart if there was no difference in any other aspect of the food including taste and price, but they did not indicate they would consume more.”

For the food industry, the changes would harmonize Canadian policy with the more relaxed regulations in the United States, which allow such products as Goldfish crackers fortified with calcium.

Proponents argue that the move would facilitate trade. A major industry group that has advocated the policy change, Food and Consumer Products of Canada, refused comment on the proposals before they are announced publicly by Health Canada.

Spokesperson Catherine Baker says that “when the regulations come out we'd be more than happy to talk about them.” — Eric Beauchesne, Ottawa, Ont. and Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

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Briefly

Creative marketing: Testimony before the Federal Court of Australia indicated that drug giant Merck paid a division of medical publishing giant Elsevier to produce several volumes of a fake journal, *The Australasian Journal of Bone and Joint Medicine*, to flog the merits of its products, particularly the antiarthritis drug rofecoxib (Vioxx). The case involves an Australian man who claims the drug caused him to have a heart attack in 2003. He alleges that Merck downplayed the cardiovascular risk of the drug prior to withdrawing it from the market in 2004. In a statement to the online news magazine *The Scientist*, an Elsevier spokesperson said that the company “does not today consider a compilation of reprinted articles a ‘Journal’.” Elsevier acknowledges the concern that the journals in question didn't have the appropriate disclosures. It is worth noting that the project in question was produced 6 years ago and disclosure protocols have evolved since 2003.”

Pharmakiosks: Ontario Minister of Health and Long-Term Care David Caplan says the province will allow drug dispensing machines to be set up in remote areas. Patients would insert their prescriptions and converse with a pharmacist at a call centre by videoteleconference. The pharmacist would verify the prescription and instruct the machine to dispense the drug. Caplan said potential benefits include patient convenience, a new made-in-Ontario industry and lower drug distribution costs.

Aging: An integrated health and social services plan and bolstered pensions are desperately needed to assist elderly Canadians, says a Senate Special Committee on Aging. Chaired by Senator Sharon Carstairs, the committee makes 32 recommendations to improve the lot of seniors, including dedicated federal financial transfers to provinces with a higher proportion of seniors (www.parl.gc.ca). — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

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Home care: Growing demand for home care spurs calls for national standards and a pan-Canadian program. — Krista Seggewiss, Ottawa, Ont.

Preparedness: Canadian response to the A(H1N1) swine influenza outbreak was significantly swifter than during the 2003 SARS outbreak. — Ann Silversides, *CMAJ*

Pandemic scale: The World Health Organization revises its 6-point scale for determining when a pandemic should be declared. — Roger Collier, *CMAJ*

Swine: The first case of human-to-human transmission of swine flu within Canada is confirmed by Nova Scotia health authorities. — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

Dispatch: An Israeli physician recalls missiles lobbed across the border. — A. Mark Clarfield, MD, Beersheva, Israel.



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