

## Briefly

**Ventilators:** Alberta Health Services will shell out \$3.9 million to purchase an additional 106 mechanical ventilators in anticipation of a pandemic (H1N1) 2009 flu outbreak this fall, President and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Stephen Duckett announced. Duckett indicated the ventilators were purchased as a result of concerns about the capacity of intensive care units to handle flu patients this fall ([www.cmaj.ca/cgi/coi/10.1503/cmaj.1093005](http://www.cmaj.ca/cgi/coi/10.1503/cmaj.1093005)). “It will enable deployment of ventilators to areas of need across the province during a pandemic,” he stated in a press release.

**Tomorrow’s doctors:** Great Britain’s medical regulator, the General Medical Council, has issued new guidance for medical schools and health facilities that is designed to provide medical students with more “hands-on” experience in hospitals and surgeries before they graduate. The guidance will require medical schools and the National Health Service to develop “student assistantships,” in which students will serve terms in health care settings to acquaint themselves with clinical procedures such as administering local anaesthetics, ordering blood samples and filling out prescription forms ([www.gmc-uk.org](http://www.gmc-uk.org)).

**Food safety widget:** The United States government will consolidate all food safety and food recall information on a single consumer website in an endeavour to “keep people safe from unhealthy food and food handling practices and up-to-date on critical food recalls,” Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius stated in a press release. The website features a downloadable widget that will instantly alert subscribers to food safety recalls ([www.foodsafety.gov/](http://www.foodsafety.gov/)).

**Delisting:** Critics charge that the government of Alberta’s recently minted Advisory Committee on Health is little more than a smokescreen for delisting procedures under medicare, but Health Minister Ron Liepert told a press con-

ference that the goal is to find a “new way to define publicly funded health services. ... We need to take a look at what should be part of our publicly funded health-care delivery system guided by the parameters of the Canada Health Act.” Splitting that hair will be a 16-member committee cochaired by Member of the Legislative Assembly Fred Horne (Edmonton-Rutherford) and patient safety advocate Deborah Prowse. The panel is expected to report to Liepert in November.

**Mandatory discussion:** Great Britain’s General Medical Council is floating the notion of revising its guidance on end-of-life care to obligate doctors to ask all terminally ill and heart patients to donate their organs after death. The move is being cast as a necessary measure to increase the supply of organs and reduce the number of patients on the transplant waiting list — more than 8000, as compared with 5700 in 2004. It currently is left to the discretion of individual doctors whether to initiate such conversations.

**Eco-dentistry:** The Berkeley, California-based Eco-Dentistry Association says the average person wastes 90 glasses of water daily by allowing the tap to run while they brush their teeth. The international association of dental professionals launched a “Save 90-A-Day!” campaign, as part of Healthcare Environmental Awareness Week in the United States (Sept. 13–19) asking people to wet their toothbrushes, turn off the tap, brush their teeth and then rinse from a small glass of water rather than allow water to run continually down the drain.

**Alcohol advertising:** Arguing that “it is essential that all the UK Governments move away from partnership with the alcohol industry and look at effective alternatives to self-regulation,” the British Medical Association has issued a call for a total ban on alcohol advertising, marketing and sponsorship of sporting and musical events. The nine-point plan also proposes to regulate the avail-

ability of alcohol products by reducing licensing hours during which they can be consumed ([www.bma.org.uk](http://www.bma.org.uk)).

**Watch and wait:** The Canadian Paediatric Society has issued new recommendations instructing physicians to “watch and wait” before prescribing antibiotics for treating ear infections in healthy children over six months of age. The recommendations stem from concerns about increasing antibiotic resistance and are limited to children who do not have a high fever and do not appear very ill. The statement also recommends measures to prevent children from getting infections, including breastfeeding babies and limited use of pacifiers ([www.cps.ca/english/statements/ID/ID09-01.htm](http://www.cps.ca/english/statements/ID/ID09-01.htm)).

**Child mortality:** The number of children under age five who died in 2008 declined below nine million for the first time since international health organizations began tracking child mortality rates, UNICEF says. Since 1990, there’s been a 20% decline in the under-five mortality rate, from 90 deaths per 1000 live births to 65 deaths per 1000 live births. The decrease was attributed to increased use of immunizations, use of insecticide-treated bednets and vitamin A supplementation ([www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)).

**Childhood obesity:** Taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages, zoning policies that prohibit fast-food outlets near schools and playgrounds, community bicycle plans and policing strategies that allow children to safely walk to schools are among a raft of measures that local governments should adopt to reduce childhood obesity, the US National Academies of Sciences says. The report also urges strategies to ensure that incentive programs are created to attract supermarkets and grocery stores to badly underserved neighbourhoods ([www.nationalacademies.org](http://www.nationalacademies.org)). — Wayne Kondro, CMAJ

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