

Briefly

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Male health policy: Workplace screening for all men in Australia for such conditions as high blood pressure, diabetes and depression will be the core component of a national male health policy, according to a report in *The Australian* (www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/men-at-work-targeted-for-screening/story-e6frg6nf-1225828951154). The male health policy is being developed in part to redress a staggering 17-year difference in the life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in comparison with all Australian men. It is scheduled to be released this spring (www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-mens-policy).

Health reform compromise: United States President Barack Obama has proposed a compromise plan to break the Congressional stalemate over health reform. The plan would give the US government the authority to regulate the health insurance industry, require Americans to carry health insurance and prohibit insurance companies from denying coverage to people with pre-existing medical conditions or from charging them more for their coverage (www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/summary-presidents-proposal.pdf). While projected to cost US\$1 trillion over 10 years, the plan may resolve the ongoing impasse in Congress, which is divided along both chamber and partisan lines (*CMAJ* 2010, DOI:10.1503/cmaj.109-3175). Obama held a televised health care summit with Democrats and Republicans on Feb. 25 in hopes of resolving the impasse.

Live long and prosper: The average life expectancy rate in Canada rose to 80.7 years from 80.5 years in the three-year period between 2005 and 2007, and from 78.4 years a decade earlier, according to Statistics Canada's latest projections (www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/100223/dq100223a-eng.htm). The life expectancy rate for women in 2007 was 83.0 years, as compared to 78.3 years for men. StatsCan also indicated the life expectancy rates are highest in British Columbia (81.2), following by Ontario (80.7), Quebec (80.4), Alberta (80.3), New Brunswick (79.8), Prince Edward Island (79.8), Saskatchewan (79.3), Nova Scotia (79.3), Manitoba (79.0), Newfoundland and Labrador (78.2) and the three northern territories (76.3).

Homeopathic hogwash?: Great Britain's National Health Service should discontinue funding of homeopathy as there is no evidence that such treatments have anything other than a placebo effect, according to the British Parliament's Science and Technology Committee. Moreover, "explanations for why homeopathy would work are scientifically implausible," the committee states in its Feb. 22 report, *Science and Technology Committee — Fourth Report, Evidence Check 2: Homeopathy* (www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmsstech/45/4502.htm). The committee also urged that the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency prohibit homeopathic product makers from including medical claims on labels unless they can demonstrate scientific efficacy.

Health demographics: Noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases and mental disorders are no longer the purview of developed nations and are imposing an ever heavier burden on low- and middle-income countries, World Health Organization Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan told the Global noncommunicable disease network global forum in Geneva, Switzerland. "Demographic ageing, rapid unplanned urbanization, and the globalization of unhealthy lifestyles are universal trends, but the consequences are not evenly felt. Develop-

ing countries have the greatest vulnerability and the least resilience. They are hit the hardest and have the least capacity to cope," Chan said in her address (www.who.int/dg/speeches/2010/ncdnet_forum_20100224/en/index.html).

Slow Canada: Internet access in Canada is slower and more expensive than in most of the developed world, according to a study by the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University in Boston, Massachusetts (http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/Berkman_Center_Broadband_Final_Report_15Feb2010.pdf). The study, *Next Generation Connectivity*, says Canada "is a poor performer on price and speed and a declining performer in penetration. ... Canada continues to see itself as a high performer in broadband, as it was early in the decade, but current benchmarks suggest that this is no longer a realistic picture of its comparative performance on several relevant measures."

Playpen accessories: Health Canada says stricter safety standards will be imposed on manufacturers of baby playpen accessories, such as change tables, bassinets, mobiles and canopies. The new regulations also include "enhanced structural testing processes and more prominent, permanent and bilingual labelling requirements" (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/legislation/pol/playpens-parcs-eng.php).

Bodybuilders beware: Health Canada says consumers should discontinue using 65 unauthorized bodybuilding products sold through the website Bodybuilding.com because they may contain anabolic steroids (www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/media/advisories-avis/_fpa-ape_2010/2010-29-eng.php). The US Food and Drug Administration earlier issued a voluntary recall of the 65 products on the grounds that they may contain the anabolic steroids "Superdrol, Madol,

Tren, Androstenedione, and/or Turinabol,” which have been associated with such side-effects as heart attacks, strokes and liver damage.

Criminal checks: Multiple criminal record checks on British surgeons who operate on children are causing delays and cancellation of pediatric surgeries, according to the Royal College of Surgeons of England. Citing instances in which trainee surgeons were checked 10 times by the United Kingdom’s Criminal Records Bureau over a two-year period, the college called for “an immediate roll out of passport-style arrangements” that allow a surgeon who received a criminal records check at one National Health Services (NHS) Trust to be cleared to perform surgery at all other

trusts (www.rcseng.ac.uk/news/children-2019s-nhs-operations-still-being-cancelled-due-to-confusion-over-safeguarding). “Is the NHS a national service or not?” it asked.

Cardiovascular drug market: While the cardiovascular drug market is expected to grow to US\$107 billion by the year 2018 from a 2008 level of US\$99 billion, the brand-name pharmaceutical industry won’t profit as much as expected because of patent expiries and generic competition, according a report by the independent business analyst Datamonitor (<http://about.datamonitor.com/media/archives/3809>). Atorvastatin [Lipitor] and clopidogrel [Plavix], two of the largest sellers on the pharma market, are

among cardiovascular drugs that will lose patent protection in 2011.

Drug industry cash: Almost 56% of United States medical residency programs to train doctors in internal medicine accepted financial support from the pharmaceutical industry in fiscal year 2006/07, according to a survey of internal medicine program directors. The survey, conducted by the Association of Program Directors in Internal Medicine, found that 132 of 236 program directors accepted money from the Big Pharma, while 170 of 236 believed “pharmaceutical support is not desirable” (*Arch Intern Med* 2010; 170:356-62). — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

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