10 health stories that mattered: Oct. 21–25, 2013

- The policy requiring British Columbia health care workers to get flu shots or wear masks during flu season is mandatory, ruled an arbitrator appointed by the province's Labour Relations Board. The Health Sciences Association, a union representing health workers, had filed a grievance against the policy. Following the arbitrator's decision, however, union leadership is recommending that its members follow the policy or risk being fired.
- Health Canada's drug safety reviews will be made public, Health Minister Rona Ambrose has informed the *Toronto Star*. Ambrose did not say when this would happen, but told the *Star* that she has asked Health Canada to "take the steps necessary to begin publishing drug reviews transparently to ensure Canadians and medical professionals have the information they need and want."
- Government funding has been restored to the Therapeutics Initiative, an independent drug safety research group in British Columbia. The University of British Columbia had stepped in to provide financing after the Ministry of Health suspended funding last year pending the outcome of an investigation into the mishandling of drug data.
- The results of the 2013 *National Physician Survey* were released, providing "comprehensive data" of the employment challenges, priorities and future plans of Canadian doctors. Some of the concerns highlighted in a news release include access to health care resources, the impact of an aging population and workforce planning issues.
- New blood regulations have been adopted by the federal government. "Having stand-alone regulations specific to blood and its components will serve to strengthen pre-existing requirements related to donor suitability assessment, collection, testing, labelling, storage, distribution and importation," announced Health Canada.
- In a speech at the White House, US President Barack Obama expressed frustration with the work of contractors, including Canada's largest technology company, and the sustained problems with the website at the centre of the Affordable Health Care Act. One of the main contractors for the website (healthcare.gov) is CGI Group, based in Montréal, Quebec. It was paid \$93.7 million to help develop the site, which has been riddled with problems since going live Oct. 1.
- Most Canadians (96%) think digital health tools are important, and 89% want personal access to those tools, according to a survey released by Canada Health Infoway. Other findings: 86% of Canadians think their doctors should use electronic medical records and 90% who access personal health information online enjoy the experience.
- Public immunization clinics are being held in Southern Alberta because of an increased risk of measles, announced Alberta Health Services. There has been a confirmed case of the illness in Lethbridge. The MMR immunization rate in some parts of Lethbridge is below 80%.
- The provision of time-sensitive procedures and medical services for women should not be based on factors such as the gender, race, sexual orientation, age or religious affiliations of patients or providers, according to a position statement by The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada that received attention in a *National Post* article. "Hospitals, facilities and on-call practitioners should not be expected to provide alternative care providers for these services," according to the position statement.
- Dr. Kevin Imrie is the new president-elect of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. Imrie is hematologist in Toronto, Ontario, and currently holds the titles of physician-in-chief and professor of medicine at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. — Roger Collier, *CMAJ*

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