10 health stories that mattered Apr 28–May 2

- The dangers that fracking poses to the environment and human health have not been properly monitored or considered, according to a report by a panel of 14 international experts commissioned by Environment Canada. The extent of potential risks, such as natural gas entering the water supply or from chemicals used during fracking, cannot be assessed due to a lack of information, states the report.
- British Columbia wants Health Canada to reconsider its refusal to allow fecal transplants for a Fraser Health pilot project involving patients with recurrent *C. difficile*. Fecal therapy is an experimental procedure, according to Health Canada, and can therefore be used only in authorized clinical trials.
- More than 200 general practitioners in Quebec have left the public health care system for private practice. The Quebec Federation of General Practitioners says about 15 family physicians have switched to private practice each year since 2007, and the Quebec College of Physicians is “quite concerned” about the issue.
- Alberta has declared a measles outbreak in Calgary, Edmonton and central Alberta. The official declaration allows the province to vaccinate infants 6–12 months old, who are usually not eligible for the measles vaccine.
- Marijuana poses serious health risks to youths and should not be promoted or endorsed, federal Health Minister Rona Ambrose announced at a roundtable meeting with researchers and health care officials. Regular long-term use of the drug can harm youth in several ways, according to Health Canada, such as reducing concentration, memory and decision-making ability.
- Privacy laws have not kept pace with advances in digital health, warns a report by the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia. The report recommends the province create a comprehensive health information privacy law with “clear and consistent rules for the public and private sector.”
- Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced the themes of an upcoming international summit on child and maternal health in Toronto, Ontario. *Saving Every Woman Every Child: Within Arm’s Reach*, May 28–30, will focus on delivering results for mothers and children, pushing for new technologies and global partnerships to improve child and maternal health, and identifying steps to ensure mortality rates drop, nutrition improves and fewer children under age five die from preventable causes.
- Ontario is increasing health care protection for firefighters by adding six cancers to the list of cancers considered related to their work. Breast cancer, multiple myeloma, testicular cancer, lung cancer, prostate cancer and skin cancer will be added to the list, which already includes cancer of the brain, bladder and kidney, as well as non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma and some forms of leukemia.
- About half of Canadian medical schools no longer require students to perform complete dissections, relying instead on pre-cut body parts and imaging technologies to save time. There is debate among medical educators about whether students who don’t plan on becoming surgeons or specialists need to perform full dissections as part of their anatomy training.
- Canada is not experiencing an obesity epidemic and government interventions to fight obesity are costly and mostly ineffective, according to a paper by the Fraser Institute, a right-wing think tank. Obesity expert Dr. Yoni Freedhoff dismissed the report, which he said is based on information that is “biased, massaged, and cherry picked.” — Roger Collier, *CMAJ*

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