

## 10 health stories that mattered: Mar.16–20

- A national pharmacare plan could reduce spending on prescription drugs in Canada by an estimated \$7.3 billion a year, according to a research paper in *CMAJ*. The researchers note that Canada is the only country with universal health insurance that doesn't also provide universal coverage of prescription drugs.
- More than 52 000 Canadians received nonemergency medical care outside the country in 2014, according to a report by the Fraser Institute, which attributed the exodus to long wait times. The largest number of those patients were from Ontario (26 252), and internal medicine procedures were the most popular (6559).
- Using fresh red blood cells in transfusions for severely ill patients is no better than using older blood cells, found a Canadian-led clinical trial published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The 90-day mortality rate among critically ill patients did not decrease when fresh blood ( $6.1 \pm 4.9$  days old) was used compared to standard-issue blood ( $22 \pm 8.4$  days old).
- Many natural health products approved by Health Canada have little or no science to back up their therapeutic claims, reports CBC's *Marketplace*. The television program received a licence from Health Canada to sell a fake children's remedy to treat fever and pain without submitting scientific evidence.
- Nearly three-quarters of people in Canadian courts found not criminally responsible on account of mental disorder (NCRMD) had at least one prior psychiatric hospitalization, according to a study in the *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*. Data for the paper and several others in the journal came from the National Trajectory Project, which examined 1800 patient files in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia. Other findings about NCRMD cases: 51% had no prior criminal conviction, 65% involved acts against a person (most likely a family member) and 15.6% were women.
- Florida's health department has dropped charges of practising medicine without a licence against the alternative-health clinic that treated two Ontario First Nations girls with cancer. The department claims there is insufficient evidence to pursue legal action against the Hippocrates Health Institute.
- Illegally made fentanyl was linked to at least 100 deaths in Alberta in 2014, a big increase from the 6 deaths attributed to the drug in 2011. Organized crime is producing fentanyl in the province and selling it on the street under the name "greenies."
- Quebec medical students plan to protest Bill 20, legislation proposed by the government that would impose financial penalties on physicians who don't meet patient quotas. Students from McGill University, the University of Sherbrooke and l'Université de Montréal all voted in favour of a one-day protest.
- Alberta is returning to decentralized health care, seven years after consolidating nine health regions into the Alberta Health Services superboard. In an effort to improve health care in rural areas, the province will create up to 10 new health districts by July 1.
- Saskatchewan delivered its budget and will devote \$5.5 billion to health care, up 1.1% from last year. Regional health authorities will receive the bulk of the money (\$3.3 billion). The Saskatchewan Cancer Agency will receive \$157.3 million, and \$10 million is targeted at improving care for seniors. — Roger Collier, *CMAJ*

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