

News @ a glance

SARS crackdown: The US government is cracking down on Internet sites selling bogus SARS prevention and treatment products. As of mid-May, the Food and Drug Administration and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) had found 48 sites selling products such as "oregano oil" to ward off SARS. The FTC advises consumers to hold on to their money: "No products have been found effective in preventing, treating or curing SARS."

Sniper sentenced: James Kopp has been sentenced to at least 25 years in a US prison after being found guilty of murdering New York State obstetrician Barnett Slepian (*CMAJ* 2003;168[11]:1456). Kopp, 48, said he intended to wound, not kill, the abortion provider. He remains a suspect in the nonfatal shootings of physicians who provided abortions in Winnipeg, Vancouver and Ancaster, Ont.

Double inquest: When Claire Lewis, 11, died unexpectedly in 2001 a few days after undergoing brain surgery, Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) set up a special committee to examine her death (*CMAJ* 2003;168[6]:757). In April 2002 it issued an apology and promised to implement changes "that will prevent a similar tragedy." Four months later, on Aug. 15, 2002, Justin Lasovich, 15, underwent similar surgery and died at McMaster Medical Centre, which is operated by HHS. Now, an inquest into both deaths will begin in September. — *Ken Kilpatrick*, Hamilton



No to Internet pharmacies: Pharmacists on both sides of the border are supporting calls to tighten rules on Internet sales of prescription drugs. A statement from the Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) and its US counterpart supports attempts to "ensure the safety and integrity" of the prescription drug supply in their respective jurisdictions. "We strongly share this concern," said CPhA Executive Director Jeff Poston. "Illegal

importation severs the key pharmacist-patient relationship — [buying drugs online is] quite different from simply shopping online for books or CDs." The Pharmacists Association of Alberta immediately said it did not support the national body over the issue.

Midwives give birth to problem: Newly minted midwives in Quebec face bleak employment prospects despite lengthy waiting lists for their services. Only 3 of the first 8 graduates of the 4-year program have found employment. Under provincial legislation (1999), Quebec midwives can provide services through only 7 health care facilities throughout the province, but they are negotiating with the government to allow them to work in homes and through hospitals. Another 8 midwives will graduate in December, and there will be room for 24 new students come September.



Emergency contraception: Specially trained Saskatchewan pharmacists will soon be dispensing Preven, an emergency contraceptive, without a physician's prescription. BC pharmacists have been prescribing Preven since 2000 (*CMAJ* 2000;162[6]:876-7). Rapid access to emergency contraception is vital because the sooner it's taken following intercourse — up to a maximum of 72 hours — the more effective it is. Pharmacists in more than 20 US states also dispense it. Participating Saskatchewan pharmacists will be trained in therapeutic protocols, patient counselling and related subjects.

Ratings for UK surgeons: The UK Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons will publish ratings for its members this year so that patients can compare the performance of individual surgeons. Surgeons will be assigned ratings of between 1 (highest mortality) and 3 stars depending on the death rates for patients undergoing coronary heart surgery for the first time. The rating scheme was recommended following the deaths of pedi-

atric heart patients at the Bristol Royal Infirmary (*CMAJ* 2001;165[5]:628).

The right to pay: Dr. Jacques Chaoulli and a patient are going to the Supreme Court of Canada over their right to provide and receive private health care (*CMAJ* 1999;161[10]:1305-6). Chaoulli and his patient want to overturn portions of Quebec legislation that effectively give the public system a monopoly over most health services. They argue that patients have a constitutional right to pay privately for certain services, such as hip surgery. Their argument was rejected by a Quebec court 2 years ago.

Heart risk: Eight in 10 Canadians have at least 1 risk factor for cardiovascular disease and 11% have 3 or more risk factors, a report from the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada says. These factors, such as smoking and obesity, are also common to other chronic diseases such as cancer and diabetes. Particularly worrisome is the growing prevalence of risk factors among young Canadians. *The Growing Burden of Heart Disease and Stroke in Canada 2003* says almost 40% of teenage girls are inactive and more than 30% of people in their 20s are overweight.

Road kill: Four times as many people are killed in traffic accidents than in war, WHO says. Traffic accidents are the biggest cause of mortality due to injury, accounting for 1.26 million deaths in 2000, or 1 in 10 injury-related deaths reported globally. Suicide was second (815 000), followed by interpersonal violence (520 000) and drowning (450 000). War and conflict were responsible for about 310 000 deaths that same year. Worldwide, injury-related mortality is twice as high for males, and 3 times as many men die as a result of traffic collisions. WHO estimates that nearly 90% of deaths due to injuries occur in developing countries. — *CMAJ*

