



new patients Dec. 16 after the Ontario Medical Association reached a tentative agreement with the provincial government.

## Hockey helmets work if you wear them

Hockey helmets and face masks that are certified by the Canadian Standards Association have virtually eliminated eye injuries — among those who wear them. While this includes all minor league and junior players under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Hockey Association (CHA) and Canadian Hockey League, it excludes about half of Canada's hockey players, including the 100 000 men playing on the 3000 teams in the Canadian Oldtimers Hockey Association.

The Canada Safety Council says that in 1974–75, before face protectors were required by the CHA, Canadian hockey players experienced 258 eye injuries, including 43 blinded eyes; the average age of the injured players was 14. In 1992–92 only 31 eye injuries were reported, including 4 blinded eyes, but none of the injured players was wearing a face protector and the average age of injured players had risen to 33.

## Attempts to identify culprits may not be in "vein"

Scientists in Britain have discovered that vein patterns on the back of hands are as unique as fingerprints or DNA. This type of identification could help in the fight against credit-card fraud or thefts from cash dispensers, and help control access to buildings, computers and countries. The British Technology Group (BTG) of London has developed a scanner capable of picking out the vein print map by using a black-and-white camera illuminated with near infrared light. Vein checking is a "physical biometric" that is more so-

cially acceptable and less intrusive than retina scanning or fingerprinting, BTG says.

## Program at Toronto hospital focuses on gay-bashing victims

A Toronto hospital's project to help emergency staff provide care for victims of lesbian and gay bashing has been made available to hospitals throughout North America. The Wellesley Central Hospital has assembled an educational manual, literature review, emergency-room protocol and educational video as part of its project, *Behind the bruises: confronting hate-motivated crimes against lesbians and gay men* (*Can Med Assoc J* 1996;155:89). The objective is to provide treatment that deals with both the physical and emotional trauma of these assaults. Information is available from the Wellesley's Department of Public and Community Relations, 416 926-7614; fax 416 926-5120.

## Private-insurance coverage on the rise

The private sector is continuing to pick up the slack created by provincial cutbacks, as more and more Canadians begin turning to extended private coverage that reimburses them for noninsured hospital and medical expenses. Data from the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association (CLHIA) indicate that 20.3 million Canadians had extended coverage at the end of 1995, a 3% increase over the previous year and a 57% jump during the past decade.

Private insurance typically covers the cost of private hospital rooms, special duty nursing, paramedical services and vision care. As provincial governments delist or deinsure certain services, the private sector has increasingly been moving to fill the void. CLHIA points to the redesign of health insurance for travellers as an

example. Dental insurance rates remained stable in 1995, with about 13.2 million Canadians covered. However, the number of Canadians with disability insurance fell by 643 000 from the previous year, to 7.1 million. The drop probably reflects layoffs and the growing popularity of contract work, which provides no benefits such as disability insurance. CLHIA said Canadians spent \$7.3 billion on private health insurance in 1995.

## MR certification introduced in Canada

The Canadian Association of Medical Radiation Technologists (CAMRT) recently conducted the first examination for its new magnetic-resonance (MR) specialty certificate. Although a relatively new technology, this type of imaging is already firmly rooted in clinical practice and has expanded into specialized applications such as spectroscopy, functional imaging and angiography. About 50 MR units currently operate in hospitals across Canada.

The certification, which follows basic training, was developed in response to the rapid development of MRI and its growing use in Canada, primarily by radiologists and medical-radiation technologists. The certifying body, CAMRT, is a partner in the CMA's conjoint-accreditation process.

## Medical charity welcomes support

PANACEA, the International Society for Better Vision, is looking for volunteers, donors, helpers and contacts to assist its charitable projects in India. Retired ophthalmologist Michael Priest of New Westminster, BC, says the Canadian registered charity provides medical services to needy children in India; these range from ocular exams to hand surgery to