

## Resources

## Ressources

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# CMA conference to look at role research plays when critical policy decisions are being made

Steven Wharry

## In Brief

PHYSICIAN LEADERS WILL MEET in Ottawa Feb. 28 and Mar. 1 for the CMA's 9th Annual Leadership Conference to examine how evidence, research and data influence health policy. For information or to register contact CMA Meetings and Travel Department, 800 663-7336, ext. 2274; fax 613 731-8047.

## En bref

DES CHEFS DE FILE DE LA MÉDECINE SE RÉUNIRONT à Ottawa les 28 février et 1<sup>er</sup> mars dans le cadre de la 9<sup>e</sup> Conférence annuelle sur le leadership organisée par l'AMC pour examiner comment les données probantes et la recherche orientent la politique publique sur la santé. Pour obtenir des renseignements ou pour s'inscrire, communiquer avec le Département des conférences et voyages de l'AMC : tél. 800 663-7336, poste 2274; télécopieur : 613 731-8047.

Evidence, research and data are the linchpins for providing quality care in the era of "evidence-based medicine," and the way those factors influence public health policy and physician practices will provide the topic for the CMA's 9th Annual Leadership Conference, to be held in Ottawa Feb. 28 and Mar. 1.

Sherbrooke, Que., gastroenterologist Henry Haddad, chair of the conference planning committee, says organizers hope the conference will answer several key questions about using research and data to justify clinical behaviour, and will show participants how to apply evidence-based measures in their own practices.

"There is a certain amount of allergy among physicians toward the phrase 'evidence-based,' but the conference will examine how policy and practice can use sound evidence gathered through research," says Haddad.

Keynote speaker Dr. Marcia Angell, executive editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, cautions that public policy on health issues does not always wait for sound research. She cites the issue of silicone-gel breast implants as an example of how the value of preliminary or limited research can be exaggerated.

When the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) banned the use of silicone-gel breast implants in 1992, there was no evidence proving the implants caused disease. In a June 1992 editorial, Angell argued that the ban would be seen as an "official confirmation that breast implants are dangerous." The FDA, however, claimed the ban simply reflected a lack of evidence about potential dangers.

Despite the FDA's original intent, the public seized on the ruling. Lawsuits against implant manufacturers multiplied. Two



Dr. John Wade: a provincial perspective



**Dr. Marcia Angell: Where's the evidence that breast implants are dangerous?**

years later the first rigorous epidemiologic study could not find a link between the breast implants and disease. By then, however, the largest class-action settlement in US legal history had been reached.

Angell claims debate concerning the safety of implants was coloured by nonscientific factors and a public perception that implants caused cancer. "There is clearly a disparity between the little that has

been demonstrated about the risks and the abundance of anecdotes now being related in the media and the courts," she wrote.

During the Leadership Conference, Angell will discuss various ways that data can drive public and health policies. This will mesh well with the conference theme, *Data for decisions: linking policy and practice with research information*.

Several other speakers will also be featured.

- Margaret Catley-Carlson, president of The Population Council and a former federal deputy minister, will discuss how public health policies are set, the ways policy is influenced by research and how evidence is used at the policy level.
- Dr. John Wade, deputy minister of health for Manitoba, will bring a provincial perspective to the discussion. He will look at factors essential for establishing and implementing effective public policy.
- Dr. Janet Hux of Ontario's Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences will discuss fundamental requirements for setting healthy practice policy. They include new information systems and the timely delivery of information to practitioners.
- Dr. Nuala Kenny, director of bioethics education and research at Dalhousie University, will look at the link between evidence and practice policies as well as factors affecting the setting of those policies. ?