



AMA supports mandatory HIV tests in pregnancy

The American Medical Association (AMA) recently reaffirmed a controversial policy by voting 271-119 in support of mandatory HIV testing for pregnant women and newborns. *American Medical News* (Dec. 23/30, 1996) reported that delegates also voted to require health professionals responsible for prenatal care to counsel patients about HIV.

Proponents of mandatory testing say their view is scientifically and ethically correct: clinical trials show that zidovudine treatment for pregnant HIV-positive women decreases the likelihood of transmission to the unborn child by 70%, but some studies indicate that only about 30% of women are being tested under the current voluntary system. However, the policy puts the AMA at odds with many groups that support voluntary

testing. The CMA has no specific policy on HIV testing for pregnant women, but a policy on HIV infection in the workplace says that "in general a patient's informed consent must be obtained before testing."

Newspaper employees report RSI

A research initiative to provide better understanding of the causes of repetitive strain injury (RSI) at the *Toronto Star* found that more than 500 employees experienced at least mild upper-limb pain 3 times over the past year. *At Work*, the newsletter of the Institute for Work and Health, recently reported that an RSI Watch team representing the institute, the newspaper and the Southern Ontario Newspaper Guild also found that just over 20% of the more than 1000 respondents reported moderate or worse upper-limb pain recurring monthly or lasting

more than a week. Moderate, severe or unbearable neck, arm or hand pain was most commonly reported by employees who spend more time using keyboards, working under hectic conditions, facing frequent deadlines and conflicting demands, and having their computer screen in "ergonomically nonoptimal positions."

How do you spell relief? S-C-R-A-T-C-H

Put away the coat hangers — a California inventor has developed a long, flexible device specifically to reach into a cast to relieve nagging itches in hard-to-reach places. Gertie's Cast Scratcher has plastic nodules that "gently yet quickly relieve a nagging itch, and without irritating or cutting skin like coat hangers and other sharp items." It also has a special handle to keep it from falling inside. A patent application has been filed.

University of Calgary students keen to revisit medical history

Is medical history becoming more popular? The University of Calgary is asking that question this month as it marks the 25th anniversary of its history of medicine course. Last year, reports *Alberta Doctors' Digest*, 40 of 68 first-year students signed up for the course, even though it is a noncredit program. The AMA publication says the course "takes a fresh hands-on approach to integrating an understanding of the past with a vision of the future."



Dr. Peter Cruse

students to participate but to arrange enough places for them. "Our problem is that we really cannot handle more than 40 students," he said in an interview, "and some students become angry when they cannot get in."

Cruse, who chairs the university's history of medicine program, thinks part of the popularity may be linked to the course's noncredit status. This, he said, means students take it "because they get excited about the history of their profession and with the idea that if they look to the past, they can get an idea of how to conduct their own affairs."

He stresses that the course also has a practical side because it teaches students how to develop the art of speaking in public and how to prepare slides for a presentation — skills that receive little development in other courses. This year's course will culminate in the university's History of Medicine Days, which will be held Mar. 20-21. Students from history of medicine programs at several medical schools across Canada have been invited to participate. Topics that will be discussed range from medicine and health care in ancient Egypt to the 150th anniversary of ether anesthesia and the "medical revolution" that has taken place in Calgary. The course begins in September and concludes when students present their papers in March.