



on the stand as a defendant. However, either may be acceptable for after-hours house calls or deliveries.

- Over the years I have saved thousands of dollars by listening to financial advice offered by colleagues — and ignoring it. Want to lose money? Buy into another doctor's business venture. Want to make money? Get that other doctor to buy into yours.
- Look after yourself: nobody else will. Take a nap. Go for a walk. Go home early. Try it 1 day next week and see if the whole world falls

apart. Perhaps it will, perhaps it won't. Once you've died from overwork, your appointment schedule will be empty for a long, long time.

### Elder-abuse handbook launched

Canada's first handbook to help professionals and volunteers identify and deal with elder abuse has been developed by the Calgary-based Kerby Centre. *Golden Years — Hidden Fears: Elder Abuse* is a 125-page book that covers issues such as the characteris-

tics of abusers, assessment of elder abuse and useful agencies to help those who have been abused. Author Virginia Boyack works with seniors at the Kerby Centre, an agency developed to meet the needs of people over age 60. It is estimated that 4% of seniors experience abuse and the problem may worsen as the number of Canadians reaching old age grows. The book is available for \$24.95, including GST, shipping and handling, from the Kerby Centre, 1113 - 7th Ave. SW, Calgary, AB T2P 1B2; 403 265-0661, x328; (fax) 403 264-7047.

### Research Update • Le point sur la recherche

#### House flies and *Helicobacter pylori*

Treatment of peptic ulcers has been revolutionized by the discovery that most ulcers are caused by *Helicobacter pylori* infection. The way this bacterium is transmitted remains unknown, however. Now researchers in Boston are looking at the possibility that the infection is spread by the humble house fly (*J Clin Microbiol* 1997;35(6):1300-3).

The researchers reasoned that house flies feed on excrement, which has been shown to contain *H. pylori* when people are infected. If the flies carry the bacterium and discharge it in their own excrement, people exposed to fly excrement could become infected.

House flies were allowed to feed on *H. pylori* grown on agar plates, then removed from the source of *H. pylori* for varying periods and subsequently dissected. The bacteria were isolated from the flies' external surfaces for up to 12 hours and from their guts and excreta for up to 30 hours after feeding. *Helicobacter*-like organisms were also found in the gut lumen and attached to intestinal epithelial cells. It appears to

be possible for house flies to become infected and spread the infection. — *C.J. Brown*

#### Genetic mutations and risk of breast cancer

Recently discovered genetic mutations play a major role in breast cancer in some families and ethnic groups, but the risk is not as high as previously thought. A series of articles in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (1997;336[20]) examines the risk of breast cancer associated with mutations in the *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* genes. In the first article, US researchers looked at 5318 subjects of Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry, since this ethnic group has a high (2%) rate of the genetic mutations. Among carriers of the mutations, the risk of breast cancer from family history was estimated at 56%, which is lower than previous estimates of up to 85%. In another article, researchers looked at the likelihood that women with a family history of breast cancer seen in breast-cancer-screening clinics had the *BRCA1* mutation. They found that most tests for the mutation, even in high-risk women, had negative results.

Another article investigated the rate of the 2 genetic mutations in women with early-onset breast cancer. The mutation in *BRCA2* was found to contribute to fewer cases of breast cancer in young women than the *BRCA1* mutation.

#### In the news . . .

#### Cracking the Spanish flu's genetic code

In 1918 Spanish influenza swept across the globe. It killed at least 20 million people, mainly young adults, in 1918-19. Now US scientists have isolated and characterized the virus that caused the epidemic from tissue samples taken from US servicemen who fell victim to the flu (*Science* 1997;275:1793-5). A H1N1 virus, the Spanish flu virus is distinct from all other strains. It appears to be closely related to early strains of swine flu and is grouped with human and swine, rather than bird and horse, strains. The proposed name for the strain is Influenza A/South Carolina/1/18 (H1N1).