



cial investigator, says 500 children will be enrolled through the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario in Ottawa, the Vancouver Children's Hospital and the IWK Grace Health Centre in Halifax.

Although chickenpox is usually just an annoying childhood ailment, Diaz-Mitoma said 1 in 200 children who contract it are admitted to hospital with complications such as hepatitis, encephalitis, arthritis or pneumonia. For malnourished children or children with immunosuppression caused by leukemia, chickenpox can be life threatening. The disease can also lead to lost work days for parents, a significant rate of illness in adults and outbreaks in hospital wards. The vaccine, manufactured by SmithKline Beecham, has proved more than 90% effective in other countries, not only in healthy children but also in those with leukemia, who stand to benefit from the prevention of chickenpox and its sequelae.

A similar vaccine was launched in Japan in 1984 but had to be stored at  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  to maintain its potency. The new formulation can be stored at  $2^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $8^{\circ}\text{C}$ , making it much easier to include in routine vaccination schedules. SmithKline Beecham is sponsoring this trial and plans to seek approval for the vaccine's use in Canada.

The vaccine contains an attenuated form of the varicella virus; as a result, up to 4% of children vaccinated in previous trials have had a minor rash and chickenpox lesions (usually less than 10) following vaccination. However, these effects are not as severe as the disease itself. It

is not yet known what impact vaccination has on the risk of shingles. — *C.J. Brown*

## Culprit unmasked in multiple myeloma

Multiple myeloma is caused by the recently discovered Kaposi's sarcoma-associated herpesvirus, US researchers have found (*Science* 1997;276:1851-4). Multiple myeloma is the second most common type of blood cancer in the US. Research had focused on why it develops in only 25% of patients with a precursor condition (MGUS). The researchers believe that both MGUS and the virus, which infects the dendritic cells in the bone marrow, may be needed for multiple myeloma. The virus does not infect the actual cancer cells, leading researchers to suspect that it causes cancer by producing a protein (interleukin-6) that stimulates the growth of myeloma cells.

## Finasteride over watchful waiting

A pooled analysis of 3 studies involving data from 49 countries shows that finasteride significantly reduces the risk of acute urinary retention and the need for surgical intervention over 2 years of use in men with benign prostatic hyperplasia (*Urology* 1997;49:839-45). One of the studies included in the analysis (the Proscar safety plus efficacy Canadian 2-year study [PROSPECT]) was published in *CMAJ* (1996;155:1251-9); the other studies are the Proscar worldwide efficacy and safety

study (PROWESS) and the Scandinavian reduction of the prostate (SCARP) study. In these combined studies, finasteride resulted in a 57% decrease in the hazard rate for acute urinary retention and a 34% reduction in the hazard rate for surgery, compared with placebo.

## In the news . . .

### Putting an end to fears about power lines

Concern about a possible link between high-voltage power lines and leukemia was sparked in 1979 with the publication of a study showing there was twice the risk of cancer among children living near power lines. Now a rigorous case-control study has found no evidence of such a link. The new study (*N Engl J Med* 1997;337:1-7) examined 638 children under age 15 with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) and 620 controls. Data collectors blinded to the children's health measured magnetic fields in the children's bedrooms and other parts of their houses, and in the houses where the mothers had lived while pregnant. The distance to power lines and the configuration of those lines was also examined. Analysis showed that the risk of ALL was not associated with either the magnetic-field levels in the home or the distance or configuration of power lines.