



August. "The strength of the Ottawa approach lies in stigmatizing antipersonnel mines as abominable, not to be used ever, on any account, by anybody, no exceptions," the *Economist* observed. "The great news is that this target no longer looks as fantastical as it once did."

WMA slams Egyptian court for "female-circumcision" decision

The World Medical Association (WMA) recently condemned Egypt's Court of Administrative Law for overturning a ban on female circumcision. Egypt, which has one of the highest rates of female genital mutilation in the world, introduced a ban on the practice last year. The World Health Organization estimates that 97% of Egyptian girls undergo the brutal procedure. "The decision of the Egyptian court makes a mockery of the United Nations allowing the International Conference on Population to be held in Cairo," said the WMA secretary general, Dr. Ian Field. "I shall be writing to the Egyptian health minister to encourage him in his appeal [of the court's decision], and the WMA and its member associations will continue to campaign for the eradication of this practice wherever it occurs." Canada passed legislation outlawing female genital mutilation in April.

Will Internet help reshape health care?

The American College of Healthcare executives says more than 40% of information found on the Internet now deals with health care issues and this relatively new medium "will play a significant role in reshaping our health care delivery system." A new book published by the college's Health Administration Press says the Internet is going to allow insurance companies to reduce administrative costs and patients will be able to "take

informed control of their medical destiny and work in partnership with physicians and payers to receive high-quality medical outcomes." Information about the book, *The Internet and Healthcare*, is available at www.ache.org/hap.html; it can be ordered by calling the Publications Service Centre, 708 450-9952. The cost of the 112-page book is (US)\$28.

National control strategy needed, cancer experts warn

Cancer experts have rung the danger bell about the increasing impact the disease is having in Canada, warning that a national control strategy must be put in place because cancer incidence is expected to double by 2010. "Cancer

should continue to have distinct status among human diseases, given the staggering demographic trends of this disease and the enormous challenges of reducing the burden it imposes," said Dr. Barbara Whyllie, director of medical affairs and cancer control for the Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) and National Cancer Institute of Canada (NCIC). "There has been steady progress in the battle against cancer, which is reflected in the stability of incidence and mortality rates for most types of the disease. However, new cases and deaths continue to rise steadily because of an increase in the size and aging of the population. This has resulted in an increase of more than 30% in the number of new cancer cases from 1987 to 1997."

BC program hopes to double mammography screening

The Screening Mammography Program of BC is launching new strategies in an attempt to more than double the proportion of BC women aged 50 to 74 who undergo screening; the current level is 32%. The program's target is a 70% screening rate every 2 years. An attempt will be made to contact all women in this age group who have never received screening and a new pamphlet will be sent to every BC physician. "The strongest influence is endorsement from the family doctor," says Dr. Ivo Olivotto, chair of the BC Cancer Agency's Breast Tumour Group. "Their role is critically important."

Olivotto also plans to expand a promising pilot project in Kamloops, where a health-promotion specialist who recruited women from a variety of community

sources achieved a screening-participation rate of more than 50%. This "direct-marketing" approach has proved successful in some other provinces and in Australia. The BC program is also sending its new pamphlet to women in their 40s who have already received screening. Olivotto says the agency is "trying to be neutral" in its position on offering mammography to women in this age group. The program

was previously perceived "to be heavily promoting mammography for women in their 40s, but the evidence was strongly against it." He says that there has been "a lot of controversy but not a lot of clarity" in information provided to these women. Alberta, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia also offer screening mammography to women aged 40 to 49. — © Heather Kent



Dr. Ivo Olivotto: FPs have crucial role



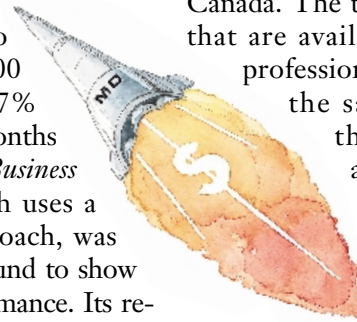
Whyllie made the comments as the NCIC and CCS released a report on the impact health care reform is having on cancer control and cancer-related services. About 130 000 Canadians will be diagnosed with cancer this year and some 60 000 will die. In calling for a national strategy, the report noted that even though the provinces are responsible for health care in Canada, a common framework concerning cancer should be developed. The report was produced following a meeting last March. That workshop, the first of its kind in Canada, brought together representatives from governments, cancer agencies and people with cancer, and produced 11 recommendations. For additional information call the CCS, 416 961-7223 x319, x318.

Heady days for MD Management

MD Management's Canadian Equity Fund is 1 of only 3 such funds with assets of more than \$1 billion to exceed the Toronto Stock Exchange's 300 Index return of 15.7% during the first 7 months of 1997. *Report on Business* said the fund, which uses a multi-manager approach, was the only diversified fund to show above-average performance. Its return for the first 7 months was 17.7%.

In August *RoB* reported that

MD Management now controls more than 90% of the "affinity market" for mutual funds in Canada. The term refers to funds that are available only through professional associations. In the same issue, it said that the MD Balanced Fund ranked eighth among similarly sized funds in terms of returns during the first 7 months of 1997, with a return of 16%; the industry average was 12.1%.



In the news . . .

All of the responsibility, none of the control

Jobs in which employees have little or no control of their work are known to be bad for morale, but now researchers have found that they are a risk factor for heart disease as well (*Lancet* 1997;350:231-2,5-9). A longitudinal study of British civil servants has shown an inverse relation between grade of employment and death from heart disease, only one-quarter of which could be explained by socioeconomic status and lifestyle factors. The study puts paid to the notion of the stressed-out executive who gets heart disease.

Too much of a good thing

Physicians at a bone-disease service in the US recently saw 4 patients with osteoporosis caused by taking too much vitamin D (*Ann Intern Med* 1997;127:203-6). The patients

had been taking dietary supplements containing high levels of vitamin D, which caused mobilization of skeletal calcium and hypercalciuria. Once the supplements were discontinued, blood levels of vitamin D, urine levels of calcium and bone mineral density returned to normal.

Impaired by fatigue

Researchers looking at psychomotor performance, a measure of hand-to-eye coordination, have found that a person who has not slept in 17 hours is as "impaired" as a person under the influence of alcohol and over the legal limit for driving in many countries (*Nature* 1997;388:235).

How transmissible is mad cow disease?

Laboratory studies of bovine spongiform encephalopathy and a similar disease of sheep, scrapie, have led researchers to believe that their ability to affect humans following exposure

is low (*Nature* 1997;388:285). The studies looked at how easily the prion proteins convert to the disease form, a step believed essential in the development of both diseases. The efficiency of conversion is correlated with the known transmissibility of these diseases.

I don't remember, I don't recall

Remembering episodes from everyday life and remembering factual knowledge depend on different parts of the brain, according to a study of patients with amnesia (*Science* 1997;277:376-80). Three patients with brain injury affecting the hippocampus had pronounced amnesia concerning events but were able to attend regular schools and achieve average levels of speech and language competence, literacy and factual knowledge. This means that episodic memory depends fully on the hippocampus, whereas semantic memory depends on other areas of the brain.