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This month over 90 peer-reviewed medical journals in more than 30 countries are participating in the publication of a "Global Theme Issue" devoted to the subject of aging. *CMAJ* invited Dr. Serge Gauthier of the McGill Centre for Studies in Aging to co-edit our contribution. Our appeal for papers generated an enthusiastic response, which demonstrates the commitment of Canada's medical community to enhancing the health and well-being of our elderly population.

This special issue of *CMAJ* reflects steady advances that have been made over the past 20 years in our understanding and management of conditions that affect elderly people. Molecular biologists and other basic scientists are breaking new ground with research on the normal and pathologic mechanisms of aging; disciplines such as behavioural neurology, geriatric medicine and geriatric psychiatry have grown in importance, and many family physicians have begun to specialize their practices to meet the needs of their elderly patients. These trends are a response to the greying of our country: the fastest growing segment of our population is the over-85 group. Nor is it insignificant that many practising physicians are baby boomers, a generation with its own concerns about this country's future with respect to health care and quality of life.

The issue begins with a report on the current health status of our elderly population. Under "Body and Mind" our contributors review what causes us to slow down with age, report on best practice in the management of Alzheimer's disease and tackle some of the common problems of aging: urinary incontinence, delirium, polypharmacy, depression and frailty. "Society" examines the sad

phenomenon of elder abuse, the huge impact on family members of caring for elderly people, the challenges of providing integrated care for frail elderly patients, health promotion strategies for seniors and intergenerational conflict. It is reassuring that the outcomes at issue in these studies pertain not only to health and economics, but also to quality of life.

James Thurber is said to have remarked when he turned 65, "I guess that puts me in with the geriatrics. But if there were 15 months in every year, I'd only be 48. That's the trouble with us. We number everything." "Soul" delves into some aspects of growing old that cannot be so easily quantified. Lynette Sutherland, now 80, gives a lively account of her return to a medical career as a fortysomething mother of 8. Nancy Yurkovitch provides a window onto the enormous attitudinal changes that have taken place over the years in Canadian medicine with a memoir of her parents, who celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary today.

Throughout this special issue the internationally acclaimed photography of Sherman Hines puts a uniquely Canadian face on aging for *CMAJ* readers at home and around the world. But perhaps here the last, exuberant, word can be given to the late poet Dorothy Livesay:

*Cheers
to be over sixty
and running the show
with everybody scuttling
for cover.*

Serge Gauthier, MD

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