



Bar codes could track the official flu of the 2002 Winter Olympics

When flu broke out at the Nagano Olympic Games last year, medical officials had no way of knowing if they were dealing with random cases or the beginning of an epidemic. At future games, however, the means to track this sort of medical problem may be found in the 10-digit, bar-coded number on the identification cards worn by all Olympic athletes, officials and volunteers. Dr. Charles Rich, chief medical officer for the Salt Lake Organizing Committee, says these codes will be used to supply real-time medical information that could help protect public health during the games.

Medical officials were frustrated in Nagano because of their inability to respond to the outbreak, says Rich, a

member of the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) medical commission. "We didn't know if these were just people getting colds in an unfamiliar place or if we had something [new] going on."

At the 2002 games, the collection of medical data will be linked to bar-coded credentials, thus giving medical officials an instantaneous picture of the patterns of infection or disease. The credentials, which must be scanned electronically before entry to games venues and the Olympic Village, will identify who is sick, where they are staying, where they have eaten and which events they have attended. If warranted, people who are infected could then be quarantined, the location of the infection made

known and those who are at risk notified.

"The goal should be to have a system that allows us to protect the public in real time and not just look at the data retrospectively," says Rich, who belongs to an IOC subcommittee that is investigating the uses of real-time medical information.

If the IOC desired, the collection of medical information could become even more sophisticated with the help of "smart cards" — credit-card-sized cards embedded with a computer chip — that would replace the bar codes. "The potential is endless," says Elmer Benites, director of information systems for the Salt Lake Games. "It's like each person is carrying a PC on the card." — © Janet Brooks

Cool sites

Human anatomy online
www.innerbody.com/indexbody.html

A new online anatomy text may be just what the doctor ordered when it comes to answering queries from patients. The site, which is designed for nonmedical users, sells itself as "an ideal reference for students studying human anatomy and for those who just want to know more about the medical descriptions commonly used by doctors and nurses." Using various anatomical illustrations, visitors can explore different body systems or study the skeleton or muscles. The system uses java-linked hot spots to link to pop-up labels that describe what the viewer is pointing at. As well, a number of animated illustrations show how organs like the heart function. Developed by the Arizona-based Informative Graphics Corp., this site is free to use and requires no downloading. — © Michael O'Reilly

Ugandan health centre awarded subscriptions



James Aw photo

A well-run community health centre in Uganda has been awarded 3-year subscriptions to *CMAJ* and its sister publication, the *Canadian Journal of Surgery* (see *CMAJ* 1999;160:63-4). Dr. James Aw (right) of the King's Health Centre in Toronto, who visited the Mukono Health Centre in February 1998, nominated it for the award. He was particularly impressed by the dedication of the centre's sole physician, Dr. Kajja Issac (left). Fever, diarrhea, respiratory infections, HIV and malnutrition are the main medical problems facing the centre's patient base of 160 000 people. Each day Issac treats about 60 patients and refers another 20, and supervises 20 staff. He dreams of building a surgical theatre as a first step toward establishing a community hospital, but his centre currently has no medical equipment.