

Nova Scotia launches assault on assault

In addition to asking patients where it hurts, doctors and nurses in emergency rooms, hospital admitting centres and clinics throughout Nova Scotia will now be asking if they have been “hit, kicked or punched by your partner or somebody else” in the past year.

This assault on assault is part of a new provincial department of health policy. “This project certainly demonstrates the health care sector’s support for family violence prevention and our commitment to achieving zero tolerance toward violence,” says Health Minister Jamie Muir.

Data point to a need for action. It is estimated that about 25% of all Canadian women are abused, and Statistics Canada says the figure is even higher for Nova Scotia — 32%. Although not all victims of abuse are female, the vast majority are, and many — 27%, according to the literature — end up in an emergency room for treatment of some problem.

“If a woman comes in with an ingrown toenail, she still has a 27% chance of having been abused or being in an abusive relationship,” explains Dr. Sam Campbell, an emergency room physician at the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax. “That emergency department visit might be our only chance to catch her and try to intervene in her particular situation.”

It appears that many women currently slip through the cracks. Last year at the QE II only 68 patients, 2 of whom were men, were referred for help as a result of abuse. “This represents 0.18% of the female patient load that the literature suggests we should be identifying,” notes Campbell.

Although it is up to each hospital and health care facility to develop its own screening policies and processes, the Department of Health will spend \$25 000 on a training program to ensure that health care professionals are asking the right questions in the right way. — *Donalee Moulton, Halifax*

CMA Online passes the million mark

March provided 3 reasons for *CMA Online* to celebrate. Not only did the Internet service mark its fifth birthday, but it also passed 2 milestones. “March marked the first time we surpassed 1 million page views [1 007 419] in a month, and it also marked the third consecutive month that we had more than 100 000 user sessions,” said Ann Bolster, the CMA’s associate director, online services. “It’s a nice way to celebrate the anniversary.”

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Quebec the breeding ground for many New Brunswick MDs

Twelve medical students will say *au revoir* to Quebec’s Université de Sherbrooke this year — as they have done in varying numbers for the last 19 years — and head home to New Brunswick to do their residency in family medicine. This one-of-a-kind residency program, launched with a single student in 1981, is designed to help recruit and retain francophone FPs in New Brunswick.

And the need for them has never been greater, says Dr. Michel Landry, director of family medicine for the province’s francophone teaching program. New Brunswick has an anglophone physician:patient ratio of 1:559 patients, but the ratio for francophone physicians is 1:838.

New Brunswick, which has no medical school, buys 20 seats at Dalhousie’s medical school each year and another 20 at 3 Quebec schools, at least 15 of which must be at the Université de Sherbrooke. When the Sherbrooke graduates are ready to move on to their residencies, New Brunswick opens its doors to 12 of them.

In their first year, the residents spend 6 months in rotation at local hospitals and 6 months at the family medicine clinic in Dieppe, a private clinic run by 10 physicians, who

oversee the residents. In their second year the new doctors spend 3 months in rotation, 3 months in the clinic and the rest of the year in another family medicine setting in a francophone community such as Bathurst or Edmundston. “The residents learn the type of practice they will be doing later on,” notes Landry. “They feel at ease to come back and work here.”

They certainly do. Of the doctors who do their residency in New Brunswick, 91% return to practise there; of NB students who do their residency in Quebec, only 53% return to practise in the province.

Despite the success of the residency program, Canada’s only officially bilingual province remains critically short of francophone physicians. Landry and his colleagues have proposed an increase in the number of residents in the special program. “To meet the demand for [francophone] family physicians in New Brunswick we need 15 extra students a year. We’re working very hard putting lots of pressure on the government to see the number of seats grow. We’ve asked for 5 extra seats next year. We’ll ask for 5 more the year after that.” — *Donalee Moulton, Halifax*