

U of A proving popular with native students

The University of Alberta is emerging as a leader in attracting native students to medical school. It has produced 16 Aboriginal physicians in the past decade, a number that Dr. Malcolm King, chair of the Aboriginal Health Careers Program for the last 7 years, says is the highest in Canada.

The major reason is the 2 spaces the medical school has reserved for First Nations students, says King. There is

usually at least 1 other Aboriginal student in the regular program, which he says is an important factor in eliminating feelings of isolation for the students. "The students themselves are their own best support group," he says. Once accepted at the school, academic requirements are the same for all students.

Part of the school's financial assistance for these students comes through awards in memory of the school's first

Aboriginal student, Darcy Tailfeathers, who died in a car accident just 2 months into his program.

In each of the last 7 years, up to 16 students have applied for the 2 spaces. King thinks the growing popularity is "a critical mass kind of thing." The school recruits nationally through career fairs, posters and its Web page (www.med.ualberta.ca/office/ugme/nhccp.html), says Anne-Marie Hodes, the program's coordinator. "When we first started, our big concern was to get students into the positions as soon as possible. If we had restricted ourselves to Alberta, that might not have happened." Nine of the 16 graduates are Albertans.

Most of the graduating physicians have entered family practice or psychiatry residencies. Two are working in First Nations communities and another 4 are in practices with large numbers of native patients. One is completing an otolaryngology residency, and another is an emergency medicine specialist.

Beginning this academic year, a medical school place will be offered to a student, native or non-native, from the Northwest Territories. The student will be sponsored by the territorial government, which will also provide a residency program for the graduate. — *Heather Kent, Vancouver*



Dr. John Brisebois of the Class of '93 presents a medicine wheel to Dr. Douglas Wilson, former dean of medicine at the University of Alberta, who launched the medical school's Aboriginal program in 1988.

Pharmacologists honour MD at centre of Sick Kids' controversy

A doctor involved in a well-publicized dispute at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children (HSC) has received the Senior Investigator Award from the Canadian Society for Clinical Pharmacology. Dr. Gideon Koren, the society president, was announced as recipient in a recent letter to *CMAJ*. He received it because he has "demonstrated excellent performance in clinical pharmacology."

Koren was temporarily suspended from his duties at the hospital in December after admitting to writing some "poison pen" letters to colleagues there

(www.cma.ca/cmaj/cmaj_today/12_21.htm). The letters, sent anonymously, were tied to him through DNA testing. They involved his disagreements with Dr. Nancy Olivieri, another Sick Kids' researcher. One of the letters said that Dr. Peter Durie, the recipient, was "contaminating [the] air and fabric" at HSC. The dispute centres around Koren's and Olivieri's disagreement over the safety of the drug deferiprone, which is used to treat thalassemia.

The announcement of the Senior Investigator Award was contained in a

list of 24 honours presented by the society. The letter was dated in December and arrived in January. A society spokesperson told *CMAJ* that "it is extremely unfortunate that the recent circumstances make the public recognition of this honour awkward."

The spokesperson said the award decision was made well in advance of the disclosures about events involving Koren at HSC and that "the society stands behind its decision to acknowledge the excellent research that Dr. Koren has performed." — *Patrick Sullivan, CMAJ*