

Booming “vanity medicine” industry under attack in Florida

Canadian snowbirds thinking of undergoing cosmetic or anti-aging medical procedures in Florida might want to think again, considering the findings of a recent investigation by the Fort Lauderdale's *Sun-Sentinel*.

The newspaper, which conducted a computer analysis of physician advertising and records from licensing, police and court records, found that more than 1700 Florida doctors now offer treatments aimed at people who are not ill. The services range from cosmetic surgery, hair transplants and weight-loss programs to chelation therapy and “face peels.”

The paper said such services account for the work of 1 in 17 doctors in private practice in the state, and is more than “the total number of doctors who specialize in treating heart disease and cancer combined.”

In a 36 000-word, 16-article series (www.sun-sentinel.com/news/newmedicine.htm), the newspaper revealed that at least a dozen unlicensed cosmetic surgeons provide their services from offices, beauty salons and even hotel rooms. In one case, an unlicensed cosmetic surgeon was found to have used a dirty, bent cake spatula bought from a discount hardware store. That practitioner left a male bodybuilder with female breast implants and a “hideous” hole in his thorax, and a 27-year-old female with badly disfigured breasts.

Meanwhile, an owner of a chain of longevity centres who claimed on his Web site to be a physician was found to have no Florida licence. He explained that he had graduated from a Canadian medical school and was licensed to practise in Canada. Last summer, an

employee of one of those centres was arrested after he dropped a box of syringes, steroids and other hormones off at a flower shop, exchanging them for more than \$1100 in cash.

The *Sun-Sentinel* also found that 18% of doctors advertising chelation therapy had no medical insurance, and 28% of them had been sanctioned by Florida's medical licensing boards, compared with fewer than 2% of doctors in the general medical population.

Dr. Vincent De Gennaro, president of the Broward County Medical Association, told the newspaper: “I think your articles are right on in terms of the problem. However, in the same paper I see a very large ad for the very person you devote several columns to. We in the medical community are at times hamstrung by everyone's pursuit of profit.” — *David Helwig*, London, Ont.

CMAJ appoints ethical-issues editor

For the first time in its 89-year history, *CMAJ* will employ an editor who will assume responsibility for the journal's discussion of ethical issues. Dr. Peter

Singer, the Sun Life chair in bioethics and director of the University of Toronto Joint Centre for Bioethics, joined the journal as a part-time associ-

ate editor in March. Singer, an internist who graduated from the U of T in 1984, is one of the country's best-known ethicists. A Medical Research Council of Canada scientist, he has published 100 peer-reviewed articles on medical ethics, particularly in the areas of organ transplantation, ethics education and end-of-life care, and he has an “evolving interest” in global issues surrounding bioethics. Dr. John Hoey, the editor-in-chief, said Singer has been a “series editor” at *CMAJ* for several years, having overseen a lengthy series of bioethics papers — *Bioethics for Clinicians* — that ran from 1996 to 1998. “We are now planning a new series that will include topics such as aboriginal bioethics, Islamic bioethics and the bioethics surrounding adverse drug reactions. In recognition of his role in producing this component of the journal, we are pleased that he accepted our invitation to join us as an associate editor.”



Dr. Peter Singer gives alms to a Buddhist monk in Thailand while participating in a workshop for medical school faculty