

On the Net

Sleep-deprived patients turning to Web for help

Many Canadians are affected by sleep disorders. Afflictions range from the occasional bout of insomnia to more serious problems such as narcolepsy and sleep apnea.

For those with too much waking time on their hands, the Web offers a wealth of information. Most sites are geared toward the patient, but a few target health care professionals.



Sleep/Wake Disorders Canada (www.geocities.com/HotSprings/1837/) is a national volunteer group that helps these patients by providing information, research and lobbying action. The site lists sleep research clinics across Canada and around the world. It also features a self-help forum where participants can pose questions, and includes stories of people's personal struggles with insomnia and other sleeping disorders.

The Royal Ottawa Health Care Group's Sleep Disorder Centre (www.rohcg.on.ca/sleep.html) is an excellent resource. It publishes a monthly newsletter covering various aspects of sleep, provides a checklist of good sleep habits and lets visitors pose questions to its professional staff. The centre's sleep laboratory is also featured in an 8-minute online video, which requires RealPlayer (www.real.com/player/).

The Canadian Sleep Society (www.css.to) is a professional association of clinicians, scientists and technologists. Its site includes sections for patients and professionals. On the patient side there is an online questionnaire to help people self-assess the quality of their sleep. The society has also arranged for several professionals to accept queries by email. For physicians there are links to current research. The site also lists sleep-related headlines from both the popular and scientific literature.

Moving south of the border, the Sleep Medicine Home-Page (www.users.cloud9.net/~thorpy/) and the Sleep Home Pages (bisleep.medsch.ucla.edu) provide hundreds of links to sleep resources. The latter a solid research section, and even a monthly book list for people facing long sleepless nights.

Finally, there are a few email-based discussion groups dedicated to sleep disorders. SLEEP-L is a moderated group for sleep specialists (email, southmay@qucdn.queensu.ca), while PEDSLEEP is dedicated to pediatric sleep problems and is open to all medical and education professionals involved in child care (email, sadeh@ccsg.tau.ac.il). — *Michael O'Reilly, mike@oreilly.net*

Quebec's GPs get a raise

Quebec's budget for general practitioners' will increase by 9% over 4 years (retroactive to 1998), with annual increases similar to those given the province's public servants. Dr. Renald Dutil, president of the Fédération des médecins omnipraticiens du Québec (FMOQ), says the agreement-in-principle, announced in May, provides higher fees for the most difficult activities performed by family doctors.

Budget increases for 1999 and 2000 will go to physicians practising in what the FMOQ has identified as priority areas: emergency room care, care of hos-

pitalized patients, obstetrical care, services in various long-term-care facilities, geriatric care and mental health services provided in private offices and clinics. Next year's increase will be earmarked for medical practices run out of private offices, which account for 65% of earnings by Quebec GPs. The province's 6500 general practitioners currently earn an average of \$150 000 annually, with net earnings of about \$99 000.

Significantly, the agreement eliminates \$150 million in overpayments that the government had wanted physicians to repay. The government agreed that these overruns were due to inadequate funding.

In addition, the agreement sets aside

\$8 million to entice general practitioners to stay in remote and isolated areas for more than 3 years, \$3 million for continuing medical education allowances and \$12.3 million to adjust pay scales for doctors working on fixed salaries.

The province also reached a 4-year agreement-in-principle with the province's specialists. Key parts of this agreement are aimed at attracting and retaining specialists in remote and isolated areas, and making provisions for new specialties, such as medical genetics and emergency medicine. A Ministry of Health spokesperson said the overall budget for specialists is being increased by \$105 million (9%) over 4 years. — *Janice Hamilton, Montreal*