

ment (OECD).¹ Although the OECD and other international organizations such as UNICEF publish international comparisons using data they obtain from Statistics Canada and other national bodies, their estimates are sometimes erroneous.² For instance, the OECD reported the 1996 infant mortality rate in Canada to be 6.0 per 1000 live births. In fact, in 1996 the infant mortality rate in Canada was 5.6 per 1000 live births,³ whereas that in the United States was 7.3 per 1000 live births.⁴ In 1997, infant mortality rates in Canada and the United States were 5.5 and 7.2 per 1000 live births respectively.^{5,6}

International comparisons of infant mortality are compromised by a lack of standardization with regard to birth registration practices. Studies have documented wide variation in the rate at which extremely small babies at the borderline of viability (e.g., < 500 g) are registered in different countries.^{7,8} In fact, recent secular trends and inter-provincial comparisons of infant mortality within Canada are also affected by such differences in birth registration.⁹ As a potential solution, the World Health Organization has recommended that international comparisons of infant mortality be restricted to live births in which the newborn weighs 1000 g or more.¹⁰ Such a restriction would eliminate a substantial proportion of neonatal deaths from the infant mortality counts of most industrialized countries, however. This and other challenges inherent in birth-weight-specific comparisons mean that international infant mortality rankings will continue to be based on crude rates and will favour industrialized countries, which tend not to register extremely small live births.

K.S. Joseph

Perinatal Epidemiology Research Unit
Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology
and Pediatrics
Dalhousie University
Halifax, NS
and
Associate Editor, *CMAJ*

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Youngest medical graduate

I too was only 22 years old when I graduated from medical school¹ in Scotland in 1966. After a 1-year rotating internship (this was before the start of family medicine training programs), I became a rural family physician in a group practice when I was aged 23 years.

Ann C. Macaulay

Department of Family Medicine
McGill University
Montreal, Que.

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The last trial of a Nazi doctor

We read with great interest the news item on the last trial of a Nazi doctor.¹ The following question arises in this connection: What is the role of the political and medical community? Health professionals working in situations of widespread human rights abuses can face significant personal risks in carrying out their duties.

In the early 1980s in Central America numerous health care workers were targeted because of their professional activities.^{2,3} In 1994 in Iraq, doctors were required by law to amputate the ears and brand the foreheads of deserters. They were told that if they refused, they would suffer the same fate. One doctor was executed and many were imprisoned for their refusal to exercise medicine punitively.⁴ This example underlines the vulnerability of the individual health care practitioner in the absence of strong collective refusal to compromise ethical and professional standards.

Is Dr. Heinrich Gross really the last physician of his "kind"? What about physicians who have contributed or still contribute to corporal punishment? There should be more precise international standards including but not limited to medical associations taking steps against the participation of medical staff in corporal punishment and in carrying out the death penalty.

Some steps have been taken by the World Medical Association,⁵ but a much more active commitment by professional bodies to defend human rights and oppose abuses is required, such as the establishment of human rights representatives in each national medical association who would visit and report on a regular basis to the World Medical Association and the Amnesty International medical office.

Siroos Mirzaei

Department of Nuclear Medicine
Wilhelminenspital
and

Hemayat (Organisation for the support of survivors of torture and war)
Vienna, Austria

Peter Knoll

Department of Nuclear Medicine
Wilhelminenspital
Vienna, Austria

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A man for all centuries

The *CMAJ* editorial of 11 July 2000 misplaces Leonardo da Vinci, “the 17th-century artist and visionary” by about a century: Kenneth Clark cites him as living from 1452 to 1519.²

Fortunately, Leonardo’s statements

and your comments on them are relevant without reference to dates.

Martin Davey
Physician
Toronto, Ont.

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[Editor’s note:]

Oops. The year 1513 was incorrectly transcribed as 1613 in a draft of this editorial, advancing da Vinci by a century. Thank you for acknowledging that his words are timeless.

Correction

A recently published commentary by Michael J. Rieder contained an error. The fifth sentence in the second paragraph should read as follows: “Adverse effects include tachycardia, muscle spasms and fatal hyperthermia associated with rhabdomyolysis and renal and cardiac toxicity, the risk of which may be increased by the high environmental and core temperature and vigorous activity likely to occur at a rave party.”

Reference

- Rieder MJ. Some light from the heat: implications of rave parties for clinicians. *CMAJ* 2000;162(13):1829-30.

HOLIDAY REVIEW 2000 CALL FOR PAPERS

Holiday reviews have become an annual tradition at CMAJ. Underneath their heavy parkas or layers of mosquito repellent, Canadian physicians have shown that they have a thoughtful soul and a quirky sense of fun.

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