

## CMAJ's new editorial fellow merges science and science fiction

Dr. Alison Sinclair leads a double life: part physician en route to becoming a pathologist and part critically acclaimed science fiction writer with 3 books, a rave review from *The Times* and a nomination for the Arthur C. Clarke Award.

Sinclair brings her multiple talents and considerable energy to *CMAJ* as its third editorial fellow. The fellowship is a 1-year position that gives residents a chance to learn the inner workings of a medical journal. "I always wanted to write for a medical journal," says Sinclair. "I just wasn't sure how to get in."

That didn't deter her from pursuing her science fiction career. She fired off her first novel at age 9, and then simply kept on writing. *Legacies* was published in 1995, and was followed by *Blueheart* in 1996 and *Cavalcade* in 1998. *Throne Price*, a space opera written in collaboration with Lynda Jane Williams, will be published next year, and a fourth novel, *Opal*, is under way.

How do SF and medicine meld? "It's useful to have a broad-ranging scientific background in writing SF," she says. For instance, the underpinning of *Blueheart* is medical ethics.



Barbara Sibbald

The theme of the displaced person features prominently in her fiction, and this isn't surprising given her peripatetic childhood. Born in Colchester, England, she spent her early childhood in Edinburgh — both parents are Scots — and then moved to Canada when her father,

a radiologist, took a staff job in Victoria in 1967. They returned to Edinburgh in 1971 and came back to Victoria in 1975.

Sinclair opted to remain in Canada for university, studying science at the University of Victoria and eventually earning her doctorate in biochemistry at McMaster University, where she was also on the varsity fencing team. After graduating she spent 5 weeks at the Banff Centre for Fine Arts, studying under the renowned Alistair MacLeod.

Sinclair then spent 2 years researching Alzheimer's disease in Boston before moving to the University of Leeds, where she worked on ion-channels research until 1995. "I love pure research but it was very insecure and medical research was taking over." So Sinclair decided to become a physician. After graduating from the University of Calgary in 1999, she began a residency in anatomic pathology in that city before taking a year off to work at *CMAJ*.

Eventually she'd like to return to research, this time in molecular pathology. She also intends to keep writing SF and "playing with hard science." — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*

## Ontario RNs start recruiting in elementary school

Ontario is so short of nurses that the province's students are being targeted by an unprecedented recruiting drive that is even setting its sights on elementary schools. The campaign is the first of its kind in Canada.

The province's 5 major nursing groups — the provincial college, the professional association, 2 unions and the organization representing registered practical nurses — received \$500 000 from the province to pursue recruitment. The Joint Provincial Nursing Committee, headed by the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, is compiling a recruitment package for every high school career counsellor including slides and a linked Web site. Initially, they have given each counsellor 100 copies of a special issue of the College

of Nurses of Ontario public newsletter, *Nursing and You*, that is devoted exclusively to recruitment. The 8-page newsletter explains the "science and art" of the profession and different career possibilities. It notes that less than 60% of Ontario nurses work in hospitals.

The nursing groups also plan to begin recruiting in elementary schools. "Many students make up their minds in Grade 5 and 6 about what they will do," says Mary MacLeod, president of the college ([www.cno.org](http://www.cno.org)), which represents all 140 000 Ontario registered and practical nurses. "We need to go back to the primary grades and recruit at that age."

MacLeod says the underlying problem in recruitment is that many guidance staff hold misconceptions about

nursing. "Nursing is not what you might have thought," she said. As evidence, she points to the broader scope of practice and the move toward more education — all Ontario nurses will need a university degree by 2005. The groups are also trying to attract more men to the profession, since they account for only 5% of nurses.

Ontario alone has a shortfall of about 12 000 nurses, and the shortage is expected to get worse as nurses retire. The average age of Ontario nurses is now 45, and MacLeod says most of them retire before age 55.

In addition to the high school blitz, the nursing groups are attending job fairs, developing a nurse shadowing program and recruiting in other countries. — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*