

Greening of health care goal of new coalition

A dozen health and environmental groups have joined forces in an attempt to make the greening of health care facilities a national issue. Members of a coalition, formed at the first-ever meeting of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE, www.cape.ca) national workshop in October, agreed that a national effort and meaningful monitoring are essential. One suggestion was to include environmental markers in the health services accreditation process. (*CMAJ* will publish a review article on sustainable health care in its Jan. 23 issue. — Ed.)

The coalition, which is comprised of groups like the Canadian Nurses Association and Pollution Probe, wants to boost awareness of health care's environmental issues among health care workers, suppliers, service providers and the public. Ultimately, the aim is to ensure that every action in health facilities is environmentally sensitive.

"We've got to get away from the notion that healing people one at a time is the only valid thing we do," said Dr. Warren Bell, the CAPE president. "We've got to adopt the notion of healing the community."

Hospitals, which account for 3.3% of Canada's gross domestic product, are significant polluters. They consume resources and generate a wide range of emissions. The US Environmental Protection Agency found that medical waste incineration is the third largest source of dioxin and accounts for 10% of mercury emissions.

"Hospitals should be exemplars of how to be environmentally healthy places," says Rich Whate of the Toronto Environmental Alliance. "Yet hospitals actually contribute to disease in the community." — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*