

## Warning issued on connection between global warming, health

A new report warning of sudden, catastrophic effects from global warming should provide an impetus for change, a leading researcher says.

The report, from the US National Academies' National Research Council, warns that people can expect "climate surprises" in the form of "large, abrupt and unwelcome regional or global climatic events": more droughts, floods, extreme temperatures, hurricanes and rising sea levels.



Canapress

Thar she blows

*Abrupt Climate Change: Inevitable Surprises*, written by the Committee on Abrupt Climate Change, brings together various branches of science to examine climate change in the past and debate future prospects ([www.nap.edu/catalog/10136.html](http://www.nap.edu/catalog/10136.html)). The report urges "proactive policies" to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and improve water, land and air quality.

Dr. Paul Epstein, an expert in global warming at Harvard Medical School, says the new report indicates that "we've underestimated the rate of this change, we've underestimated the sensitivity of biological systems, we've underestimated the cost of global warming."

The cost of failing to act could rise quickly, Epstein says, but "the good news is that clean and efficient energies can become engines of growth and stimulate the global economy." Epstein is the author of several papers on the effects of climate on health (see *CMAJ* 2000;163 [6]:729-30), and associate director of Harvard's Center for Health and the Global Environment.

He has also co-authored a paper linking drought to the spread of the West Nile virus (*Global Change and Human Health* 2001;2[2]:1-4).

Evidence from Greenland ice cores shows that major changes occurred rapidly in the past, almost as if a switch had been flipped. Does global warming

mean we have already pulled the switch? There is no simple answer, says Epstein. Major transformations may be caused by triggers that force a climate system across a threshold and result in huge change. — *Debra Martens, Ottawa*

### Concerns mounting over pediatric workforce

Canada is facing a critical shortage of pediatricians, the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) warns. In January the CPS reported that 40% of Canada's pediatricians plan to retire by 2010, and it says there aren't enough replacements being trained. "A crisis is looming in Canada's pediatric work force," states the report, which is based on a survey of 1700 pediatricians conducted between 1999 and 2000.

Dr. Robert Haslam, emeritus professor of pediatrics at the Alberta Children's Hospital, says the overall number of medical students being trained in Canada declined by 18% during the 1990s before rising again in the past 2 years. As a result, the number of new graduates entering specialty training has been smaller too.

"We are approaching crisis proportions because many pediatricians are retiring early due to stress and too many work hours," says Haslam, who is also a member of the CPS Physician Resource Planning Committee. CPS data indicate that pediatricians now work an average of 54 hours a week, up from 49 hours in 1995.

Another concern is a shortage of residency positions. Jan White, medical education co-coordinator for pediatrics at the University of Toronto, says that school has only 12 residency slots in pediatrics, but it is still the largest program in Canada. He said there were 135 applicants for those 12 positions this year. Overall, 64 positions were available in Canada in 2001, 2 more than in 1997, and all were filled. — *Jennifer Jones, Ottawa*

### Please come here, 1000 residents beg doctors

Like many small towns in Nova Scotia, Parrsboro is actively hunting for family physicians, and in an effort to lure a particular husband-and-wife team it did things a little differently. Not only did the town send a letter encouraging the potential candidates to practise there, more than 1000 of the town's 1600 residents turned out to sign it.

Parrsboro Mayor Doug Robinson said the local hospital was going to send a letter to the doctors, but the idea that it should come from the entire town took hold. Unfortunately, even though the campaign impressed the 2 physicians, who had a practice in nearby Truro, family commitments in Scotland were a higher priority, and they returned there.

Parrsboro remains 1 of 5 communities participating in the province's rural incentive program. Frank Peters, the province's physician recruitment coordinator, says doctors who agree to set up shop are guaranteed minimum billings of \$162 000 a year for 5 years, a \$10 000 bonus each year for 5 years, 50 hours of CME and a \$5000 moving allowance.

He said almost every town that has participated has eventually had a family physician sign on the dotted line. — *Donalee Moulton, Halifax*