

News @ a glance

Residency by gender: Data from the 2003 residency match point to some strong gender preferences as men and women choose their career paths. This year 32.3% of women made family medicine their first residency choice, compared with only 17.9% of men. Meanwhile, 28.3% of men marked a surgical specialty as their first choice, compared with only 9.5% of women. Other popular first choices among women were internal medicine (14.8%) and pediatrics (10.7%). Among men, other popular choices were internal medicine (15.5%) and diagnostic radiology (9.5%).

Diabetes warning: Unless eating and exercise habits improve, 33% of Americans born this year will become diabetic, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns. This lifetime risk is about triple the American Diabetes Association's current estimate. If the prediction is accurate, about 45 million Americans will have diabetes by 2050. "There is no way that the medical community could keep up with that," said the CDC's Dr. Venkat Narayan.

Cure.All for fraud: Scammers beware. Operation Cure.All (www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/edcams/cureall/), launched June 19, is a collaborative effort by authorities in Canada, Mexico and the US to eliminate cross-border barriers to the enforcement of antifraud laws. Criminal charges have been laid against several Toronto residents who allegedly used high-pressure sales tactics to induce Americans to purchase discount health plans. The scam reportedly grossed about US\$8 million last year. Meanwhile, the US has charged 2 companies with making false and unsubstantiated claims about the benefits and safety of "Seasilver" — a liquid supplement that claims to treat or cure 650 diseases, including AIDS and cancers. "Using these ineffective products is worse than wasting money," said US Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Mark McClellan.



Leaving the TV behind: Canada's pediatricians are worried about the impact heavy TV viewing and computer use is having on children, so the Canadian Paediatric Society has cocreated a program to help physicians talk to patients and their families about the issue (www.cps.ca/english/proadv/MediaPulse/index.htm). A handbook is being distributed to more than 15 500 pediatricians and FPs. "We want physicians to help raise their patients' awareness and show them how to think critically about media messages," said Dr. Peter Nieman, principal author of a CPS position statement on the issue. The society says problems related to heavy use include sedentary lifestyle and low self-esteem.

Research made readable: A new peer-reviewed research journal aims to appeal to both doctors and patients. The *Annals of Family Medicine*, a collaborative effort of 6 family medicine organizations, including the American Academy of Family Physicians, will be published 6 times annually and is available free online (annfamned.org). The journal aims to "support a transdisciplinary learning community of those who generate and use new knowledge about health primary health care," the inaugural editorial states.

Magic bullet? Researchers say they have found a way to prevent 80% of heart attacks and strokes — all with one pill (*BMJ* 2003;326:1419-25). The authors say that widespread use of the "Polypill" would "have a greater impact on the prevention of disease in the Western world than any other single intervention." The pill would contain a statin, 3 antihypertensive drugs, folic acid and ASA. *BMJ* Editor Richard Smith said "it's perhaps more than 50 years since we published something as important as [this] cluster of papers."

Canadian ethicist joins WMA: Professor John Williams, the CMA's director of ethics for the past 12 years, is moving to France to head the World Med-

ical Association's new medical ethics unit. The WMA is known for its work at developing medical ethics for physicians worldwide, most notably the Helsinki declaration concerning medical research, and Secretary General Delon Human says the new unit will allow it to expand this work.

Drug spending rises: In 2002 Canadians spent 13.9% more on pharmaceuticals than in 2001, with the total reaching \$13.1 billion. The Patented Medicine Prices Review Board annual report states that sales of patented drugs increased by 17.3%, to \$8.8 billion. Patented drugs now account for 67% of all sales, up from 45% in 1996. Brand-name drug companies reported R&D expenditures of \$1.18 billion in 2002, an increase of 11.6% over 2001.



Safer driving: Consistent implementation of traffic laws could reduce the 3000 daily deaths worldwide from road-traffic crashes, researchers say (*Lancet* 2003;361:2177-82). Using a case-crossover design, Dr. Donald Redelmeier and his coauthors found that drivers who are caught breaking the law in Ontario have a lower risk of a fatal crash for up to 3 months following their conviction. They argue that better enforcement could result in fewer crashes. About 30 000 road-traffic injuries occur worldwide every day.

Smoke-free or bust: As of 2008, the Canadian Paediatric Society will no longer hold any meetings in cities that do not have smoke-free bylaws in place, and it is urging other organizations to follow suit. The resolution, passed at the annual meeting June 21, does not take effect for 5 years because the the CPS has to fulfil its current meeting contracts. "It's a natural extension to practise what we preach," says CPS Executive Director Marie Adèle Davis. — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*