

## News @ a glance

**BC pursues tobacco lawsuit:** The BC government is appealing a ruling by the BC Supreme Court that its Tobacco Damage and Health Care Costs Recovery Act is unconstitutional. The act would allow the government to sue tobacco companies to recover an estimated \$500 million in smoking-related health care costs. BC Attorney General Geoff Plant said the government's contention is that the trial judge's constitutional analysis contained an error.

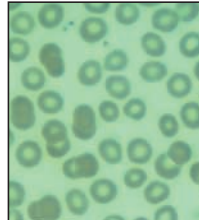
**No free lunch in Israel:** Israel's health ministry has been given 5 months to establish rules on the relationship between physicians and pharmaceutical companies. The Knesset's health committee is concerned about potential conflicts of interest between physicians and drug companies, which give doctors free medications, presents and trips. Professor Avinoam Reches, chair of the Israeli Medical Association's ethics committee, agreed that these ethical standards are important, but stressed that without medical company funding, quality medical research would be impossible.

**U of A grads shun family medicine:** The University of Alberta produced the country's lowest proportion of medical graduates who listed family medicine as their first residency choice in 2003 (16.5%), while the universities of Saskatchewan and Calgary had the highest proportion (32.7% and 31.8%). Detailed data from the first round of the 2003 Canadian residency match (*CMAJ* 2003;168[7]:881-2) indicate strong differences in preference. In Ontario, 30.6% of graduates from McMaster University made family medicine their first choice, compared with 22.1% at the University of Toronto. On the 2 coasts, 26.8% of graduates at Memorial University chose family medicine, compared with 23.1% at the University of



British Columbia. Overall, 24.8% of 2003 graduates made family medicine their first residency choice, the lowest proportion ever recorded.

**Blood donations tested:** Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec began using a newly approved test to screen donated blood for the West Nile virus on July 3. The polymerase chain reaction test from Roche Diagnostics was given a priority review by Health Canada, since no similar tests are available. Any units of blood that test positive will be discarded, and the donors will be barred from making donations for 56 days.



**"Abortion pill" use doubles:** Two years after the US government approved the use of mifepristone (RU-486), the "abortion pill's" popularity has nearly doubled. Planned Parenthood, which provides the drug at 172 sites (*CMAJ* 2003;168:211), says 25 845 American women received mifepristone last year, compared with 12 712 in 2001. Mifepristone, a progesterone blocker, induces abortion in women who are up to 8 weeks' pregnant. It is not available in Canada.

**Truce between chiropractors, MDs?** Manitoba doctors can now refer patients to chiropractors with their college's approval. After issuing a new joint statement, doctors and chiropractors will establish a formal working relationship, including a liaison committee to promote cooperation. "It's a positive move," Registrar Bill Pope of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba told the *Winnipeg Free Press*. "It's the right thing to do." Many physicians object to chiropractic, challenging both its efficacy and the potential risks it poses for patients.

**India, China face AIDS crisis:** The current AIDS problem in the world's 2 most populous countries is similar to the situation in Africa a decade ago, the director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns. "If we don't intervene ... we will have a catastrophe of a very, very profound increase in the number of cases," said Dr. Julie Gerberding. China estimates that 1 million of its citizens are HIV positive, and the UN warns that this total could reach 10 million by 2010. In India, more than 4 million people are now HIV positive.

**We're slipping:** Canada has dropped to eighth place in the UN's quality-of-life rankings. It had slipped to number 3 last year after spending several years in top spot. Ranking ahead of Canada are Norway (1), followed by Iceland, Sweden, Australia, the Netherlands, Belgium and the US. Ranking lowest among the 175 countries is Sierra Leone, where the life expectancy is 34 years.

**Canada signs tobacco treaty:** Federal Health Minister Anne McLellan signed the first worldwide antismoking treaty, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, on July 15. It had been adopted unanimously May 21 by the 192 member countries of the World Health Organization (*CMAJ* 2003;168[10]:1263-4). The framework is designed to reduce tobacco consumption through higher taxes and stronger health warnings.

**Fewer health grads:** The number of health-related degrees, diplomas and certificates awarded by universities declined by 6.1% between 1999 and 2000, Statistics Canada reports. One possible reason is that health employees are about 7 times more likely to cite fear of accident or injury than employees in the management, business or finance fields. — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*

