

## News @ a glance

**Battle over cheap smokes:** Tobacco companies are threatening Alberta's antitobacco strategy by bringing low-price cigarettes to the heavily taxed market. The discount brands sell for about \$2 less than regular brands, which cost about \$10 for a pack of 25 thanks to a \$2.25-per-pack provincial tax hike in March 2002. Antismoking advocates say the 20% discount provided by the cheaper brands is a serious incentive to start or keep smoking. Increasing the cost of cigarettes probably helped encourage people to quit smoking, said Les Hagen, executive director of Action on Smoking and Health. It and other groups now want the federal government to consider amending the Tobacco Act to prohibit discount cigarettes. — *Lisa Gregoire, Edmonton*

**Breast-feeding poster cover-up:** New Zealand's health minister has pulled a World Breast-feeding Week poster featuring a bare-breasted male actor from display, saying it was "inappropriate at this time." The image encouraged people to consider whether breast-feeding at work would be more acceptable if men had to do it. A key barrier to breast-feeding is returning to the workforce, said Louise James, who initiated the campaign for the Women's Health Action Trust. In test groups, the poster



Women's Health Action Trust

"generated discussion on breast-feeding in the workplace, exactly what we wanted," James told *CMAJ*. "We were very disappointed."

**Into the Crisis Zone:** Ever wondered what it's like to work amidst violence and famine? *Crisis Zone*, a 13-part series narrated by Kiefer Sutherland, covers 30 Médecins Sans Frontières projects and profiles 45 volunteers, including 2 Canadians: Dr. Bruce Lampard Oct. 23, and nurse Katiana Rivette Oct. 30. The series is on the Life Network until Jan. 1.

**Ecstasy study retracted:** Researchers from Johns Hopkins University have retracted findings that emerged from their study of the street drug ecstasy. The findings, published in *Science* in September 2002, were billed as one of the most dramatic warnings about the dangers of ecstasy. Dr. George Ricaurte and colleagues studied use of the popular drug, N-methyl-3,4-methylenedioxy-amphetamine (MDMA), in nonhuman primates and concluded that ecstasy users may risk developing neuropsychiatric disorders related to brain dopamine or serotonin deficiency. Since publication, the researchers have been unable to replicate their findings. They withdrew the study because a labelling error meant the animals had actually been given a different drug, methamphetamine, and their findings were consistent with its use. In their retraction (Sept. 12, 2003), the researchers state: "This apparent labelling error does not call into question the results of multiple previous studies demonstrating the serotonin neurotoxic potential of MDMA in various animal species, including several nonhuman primate species." — *Allison Gandy, CMAJ*

**Kids buy smokes online:** A study in *JAMA* (2003;290:1356-9) found that children can easily buy cigarettes over the Internet, and that children as young as 11 were successful at the Internet purchases more than 90% of the time. There was little attempt to identify the age of the buyer at the time of purchase or delivery; 86% of the time the purchased tobacco was left at the buyer's door or was accepted by the young pur-

chaser without proof of age. In the US, more than 400 Web sites sell tobacco products, typically for much less than other retailers. The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids is calling on the US government to establish safeguards against online sales to children.

**Ambulance driver charged with speeding:** British legislation allowing emergency vehicles to break speed limits if necessary will be debated in court after an ambulance driver rushing a donated liver to a hospital was charged with speeding. Police clocked Mike Ferguson driving at 167 km/h. He said he was asked to transport the organ as quickly as possible, but prosecutors say the trip did not constitute a medical emergency and have asked the court for a ruling. — *Mary Helen Spooner, West Sussex, UK*

**Forum on cervical screening:** New technologies that could benefit women's health mean that Canada's cervical cancer screening guidelines (*CMAJ* 1976;114:1003-33) must be updated, experts say. The Pan-Canadian Forum on Cervical Screening, which comprises 7 national organizations including the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, is looking for online feedback ([www.g-o-c.org](http://www.g-o-c.org)) on 5 draft position papers. The papers cover human papillomavirus (HPV) primary screening, triage of abnormal pap smears, cytopathology (liquid-based, conventional), HPV prevention and cervical screening delivery methods.

**Clinician moves into CMA ethics post:** Ethics and clinical medicine have merged at the CMA following Dr. Jeff Blackmer's appointment as the association's executive director for ethics. Blackmer, the first clinician to hold the post, replaces John Williams, PhD, who left the CMA this summer to become director of ethics at the World Medical Association's European headquarters. In addition to working at the CMA, Blackmer, a physiatrist, is an assistant professor of rehabilitation medicine at the University of Ottawa and practises at the Rehabilitation Centre. — *Compiled by Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*