

## News @ a glance

**Ecstasy use soars:** Global use of the street drug ecstasy increased by 70% between 1995 and 2001, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime says, while use of amphetamines rose 40% over the same period. More than 40 million people, or 1% of the world's population aged 15 and over, have used amphetamine-type stimulants. Use of these drugs can cause dependence, memory loss and premature decline of other mental functions (*CMAJ* 2001;165:917-28).

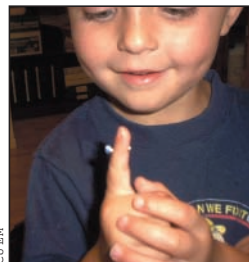
**CJD claims NB woman:** Health Canada has confirmed the death of a New Brunswick woman due to classic Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. Dr. Gordon Dow, an infectious disease specialist at the Moncton Hospital, says this was not a case of vCJD, the variant form of the disease linked to the consumption of meat from cattle that had bovine spongiform encephalopathy. The 54-year-old woman, who died July 31, may have become infected via a dura mater patch used during brain surgery at the Moncton Hospital in 1992. Use of the patch, which employs tissue taken from cadavers, was banned by Health Canada last April. Seven patients who received dura mater transplants at the hospital between 1991 and 1993 have been contacted. According to Health Canada, classic CJD occurs at a rate of about 1 case per million people per year. — *Donalee Moulton*, Halifax

**Surgeon to head Royal College:** Dr. Stewart Hamilton, an Edmonton general surgeon, has been named president-elect of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. Hamilton, a McGill

University graduate who does research in trauma and critical care medicine, has published extensively. He recently completed 2 terms as the Walter Stirling Anderson Professor and chair of the Department of Surgery at

the University of Alberta in Edmonton. He will become the 38th president of the Royal College during its annual meeting in September 2004.

**No nose magnets:** Faux body-piercing with nose magnets is popular among younger children but can pose a hazard. If children put the jewelry-magnets on both sides of their nose, the 2 pieces on the inside of the nostrils may attract each other and adhere across the septum, researchers report in the *Canadian Journal of Emergency Medicine* (2003;5:356-8). Depending on how long the magnets stay stuck, the child could suffer septal ischemia, necrosis and perforation.



**Smoking around the world:** The developing world is catching up to industrialized nations in tobacco use. Figures from 2000 indicate that nearly as many people died from smoking in the developing world as in industrialized nations (*Lancet* 2003;362:847-52). The researchers estimated that in 2000, 4.83 million premature deaths were attributable to smoking — 2.41 million in developing countries and 2.43 in industrialized nations.

**Free lunch in Windsor:** A restaurateur in Windsor, Ont., is offering 2 neurosurgeons free food for life if they stay in the city of 350 000. Drs. Srinivasa Chakravarthi and Siva Sriharan, who are planning to move to the US, are "a bit embarrassed and deeply touched" by the gesture, but don't expect they'll change their plans. Sriharan operated on John O'Kane of Casey's Restaurant last year.

**More Americans uninsured:** The number of American without health insurance rose by 2.4 million between 2001 and 2002, to 43.6 million, the US Census Bureau reports. The number with insurance increased by 1.5 million, to 242.5 million. An estimated 15.2% of Americans had no health insurance coverage during 2002, up from 14.6% the year before. The proportion of insured children remained constant at 64.8 million — 88.4% of all children.

**Road to death:** More than 1.2 million people are killed on the road annually

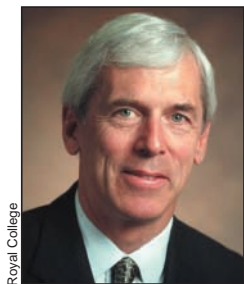
and millions more are injured or disabled, the World Health Organization reports.

In September, representatives from more than 20 countries developed a global initiative on road safety that will be launched on World Health Day on Apr. 7, 2004. Road traffic fatalities are expected to be a major contributing cause to the projected increase in deaths from injuries from 5.1 million in 1990 to 8.4 million in 2020.

**Cardiologists compete in diet challenge:** Cardiologists at the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax have been challenged to practise what they preach. Last year, 7 cardiologists and their partners went on a regimen of proper nutrition and exercise. Most stuck with it and saw positive changes. "Some people actually had quite a significant improvement in their cholesterol profiles," says participant Dr. Jafna Cox. — *Donalee Moulton*, Halifax

**Nursing education improves outcomes:** A review of 168 Pennsylvania hospitals found that surgical patient death rates were nearly twice as high when the percentage of nurses with university degrees was low. The researchers (*JAMA* 2003;290:1617-23) suggest that hiring nurses with a 4-year bachelor's degree instead of 2- or 3-year diploma "may lead to substantial improvements in quality of care."

**Beware of booze:** The Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association wants Ottawa to act on its commitment to put warning labels on alcoholic beverages. They would caution women about the dangers of drinking while pregnant. More than 3 years ago, MPs voted overwhelmingly — 217 to 11 — in favour of the labels, but nothing has been done. NLMA President Susan King says about 4500 Newfoundlanders show the effects of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, the leading and 100% preventable cause of mental disability in western countries. — Compiled by *Barbara Sibbald*, CMAJ



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