

News @ a glance

Northern med school recruits:

Canada's first new medical school in 30 years is looking for faculty to fill more than 30 full-time-equivalent teaching positions. The Northern Ontario Medical School (NOMS), slated to begin with 56 students, is the first med school in Canada to have 2 distinct campuses (in Sudbury and Thunder Bay) and to focus solely on rural medicine. The school's curriculum will also reflect the needs of francophone and First Nations people. At least 5 First Nations representatives will sit on the school's 35-member board of directors. The new dean for the Thunder Bay campus, Dr. Daniel Hunt, will be responsible for leadership on Aboriginal issues. The school needs to fill more than 30 full-time equivalent teaching positions. The school is to open in September 2005 — a year after its originally scheduled opening. The school suffered a setback when 2 newly hired campus deans quit shortly after accepting their posts (*CMAJ* 2003;168[10]:1367).

Public Health leader honored:

The Toronto YWCA honoured Dr. Sheila Basrur May 20 as one of 7 winners of this year's Women of Distinction awards. Basrur, Ontario's chief medical officer of health, became familiar to most Canadians as the calm face and reassuring voice providing health information during Toronto's SARS crisis last year. At the time, Basrur was the city's



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medical officer of health. The YWCA award honours Basrur for developing women's health programs and supporting access to services and information on sexual and reproductive health, as well as for her understanding and promotion of health issues faced by immigrant and refugee women.

RIP cigarettes:

Canada is the first country to require the manufacture of fire-safe cigarettes. Bill C-260, passed by Parliament Mar. 31, requires cigarette companies to reduce the fire ignition propensity of all cigarettes sold in Canada. The law takes effect at the end of this year, but Ottawa is still drafting associated regulations (www.gosmokefree.ca). The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs reports that smoking materials started 14 030 fires from 1995 to 1999. These materials were also the leading cause of fire-related deaths, killing 356 people and injuring 1615 during the same period. MP John McKay introduced the legislation, an *Act to amend the Hazardous Products Act (fire-safe cigarettes)*, as a private member's bill. In related news, the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control has now been signed by 102 countries (*CMAJ* 2003;168[10]:1263-4).

MRSA leap: Concern about the rising incidence of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) deepened in the UK in March with the publication of research (*Arch Dis Child* 2004; 89(4):378-9) showing that infection rates among children have mushroomed over 10 years. The number of positive samples as a proportion of all

S. aureus infections jumped to 13% in 2000, from 0.9% in 1990. In February, the UK's Health Protection Agency revealed that deaths among all age groups caused by MRSA jumped to 800 in 2002, from 51 in 1993. A research letter published in *Lancet* (2004;363:706) revealed a link between postoperative MRSA infection and social deprivation. The authors found that patients from the most deprived areas had a 7-fold higher infection rate after coronary artery bypass grafting compared with those from the least deprived areas. — Colin Meek, Wester Ross, Scotland



Steve Wherry

WHO to review RCTs: To make it easier for the scientific community to keep on top of current research, randomized controlled trials (RCTs) approved by the WHO ethics board will now receive an International Standard Randomized Controlled Trial Number (ISRCTN) and be registered. Access to the first global register, operated by WHO and Current Controlled Trial (CCT), will be free online (www.controlled-trials.com/). One of WHO's biggest challenges is coordinating multinational research activity in the global effort to reduce maternal mortality, and in its campaigns against HIV, re-emergent tuberculosis, malaria and polio. "For controlled trials to be useful on a global scale, it is critical that research be coordinated. (Trial Numbers) offer a way to do exactly that," said CCT's Managing Director Anne Greenwood. The register may also help to mitigate publication bias because RCTs will be registered at the start of the research. — Compiled by Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ