

News @ a glance

US reprieve: Canadian health care workers have been given an extra year to fulfill tough new visa requirements for working in the US. Washington granted the extension after lobbying from state politicians and hospital administrators who feared the red tape would cut off an essential supply of nurses, lab technicians, therapists and others who routinely cross the border to work in the US. “We were concerned,” said Steve Leavett of the nurses’ association in Maine, which relies on NB nurses. Under new regulations passed last September, foreign health care workers had until July 26 to obtain a visa certificate stating they have education, training and experience comparable to the requirements



Corbis/Magma

for American workers. The deadline is now July 26, 2005. The American Hospital Association estimates 15 000 Canadian health care workers may be affected by the new rules. — *Christine Morris*, Fredericton.

MD-MPs: Four physicians, all Liberals, and all incumbents, will sit among the 308 MPs elected to the new Parliament in the June 28 federal election. Dr. Bernard Patry retained his Montréal-area (Pierrefonds–Dollard) riding, capturing 63% of the vote, and Dr. Carolyn Bennett won Toronto’s St. Paul’s riding by 21 000 votes. On the West coast, Drs. Hedy Fry and Keith Martin enjoyed impressive victories. Fry won

her Vancouver Centre seat by more than 4000 votes, while Martin, who switched to the Liberals from the old Alliance Party, captured Esquimalt–Juan de Fuca by about 2500 votes. Incumbent Liberal Dr. Rey Pagtakhan lost to the NDP in Winnipeg North by 3000 votes. Six other physicians ran and lost: Dr. Bob Mullan in Nova Scotia’s Kings–Hants; Dr. Avalon Roberts in Calgary Southwest; Dr. Sanjeev Goel in Ontario’s Brampton West; Dr. Chris Milburn in NS’s Sydney–Victoria; Dr. Gulzar Cheema in BC’s Fleetwood–Port Kells riding; and Dr. Gordon Guyatt in Ontario’s Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale riding.

Nimble fingers needed: Young physicians are still at risk for potentially deadly injuries from suture needles, according to a recent survey (*AOHP Journal* 2004;34[1]). Researchers found physicians-in-training suffered 69% of suture needlesticks related to catheter securement at teaching hospitals, consistent with earlier research. “The risk to these clinicians hasn’t received much attention, and yet they face significant needlestick risk when they’re assigned tasks such as suturing,” said MaryAnn Gruden, president of the Association of Occupational Health Professionals and survey coauthor. The authors recommend educating young doctors about sharp injury hazards and the use of safer devices. — *Natalie Dunleavy*, Ottawa.

Victims of fashion: Almost half the neckties worn by doctors in a New York hospital carried pathogens, compared to only 1 of 10 ties worn by security guards in the same hospital, according to a study presented at the American Society for Microbiology annual meeting in New Orleans in May. The study, conducted at New York Hospital Medical Center of Queens, was launched after a medical student



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observed that ties often swung close to or touched patients during examinations. Steve Nurkin and colleagues swabbed 42 neckties worn by physicians, physician assistants and medical students who regularly saw patients and 10 neckties worn by security personnel. Twenty of the 42 clinicians’ neckties carried pathogens, including *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae* and *Aspergillus*. In contrast, the tie of only 1 security guard carried a single pathogen (*S. aureus*). The findings have elicited suggestions: encouraging bow ties or tie pins to stop ties from swinging down; detergent spray; necktie condoms, or abandoning ties altogether. — *Pauline Comeau*, Ottawa

Smokers file suit: A class-action lawsuit has been filed in the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador against Imperial Tobacco Ltd. alleging deceptive trade practices in the company’s marketing of its light cigarette brands. St. John’s lawyer Ches Crosbie said the plaintiffs are not seeking damages, they just want their money back. If the Supreme Court approves certification for the class action, it could take up to 5 years for a ruling. A similar class-action suit has been filed in BC, and certification will be argued in court in October. — *Compiled by Barbara Sibbald*, CMAJ