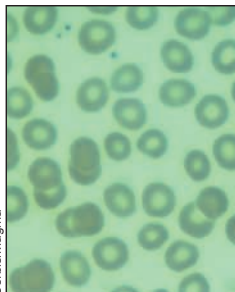


## News @ a glance

**Tainted blood case:** The Canadian Red Cross pleaded guilty May 30 in Ontario Superior Court to a charge under the Food and Drugs Act for distributing blood products infected with HIV and hepatitis C between January 1983 and May 1990. The Canadian Red Cross did not start testing for HIV until 8 months after a test was available and waited 4 years before starting to screen for hepatitis C. The Crown and lawyers for the Red Cross recommended a \$5000 fine, the maximum allowed under the act. Charges are pending against Dr. Roger Perreault, former head



Corbis/Magma

of the agency's blood transfusion service. A hearing is slated for July. Dr. Pierre Duplessis, head of the Canadian Red Cross, said the agency "deeply regrets not developing and adopting measures more quickly to reduce the risk of infection." The Red Cross will contribute \$750 000 into a national endowment scholarship program for students affected by the tragedy and \$750 000 toward a national medical error research project. In 1998 the Canadian Red Cross transferred its blood operations to Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec, using \$70 million in proceeds to compensate those infected.

**Organs for Iraqis:** A group of veterans is urging people to donate kidneys, livers, bone marrow and umbilical stem cells to Iraqi children injured or maimed in the war. Bruce Gorcyca, 50, a US Coast Guard veteran living in Mississauga, Ont., founded Veteran Organ Donors International. He says he plans to donate a kidney, a section of his liver and bone marrow to help 3 Iraqi children. The orga-

nization encourages living and postmortem donations, and accepts donated medical equipment for Iraqi hospitals. "I'm not Bill Gates, I'm not Ross Perot," says Gorcyca. "All I could think of was those kids are dying because they need organs." But some organizations question the group's practice of offering free vacations for people who recruit donors. "We have approximately 1900 people in Ontario waiting for organ transplantation," says Frank Markel, president and CEO of Trillium Gift of Life Network. "No matter how laudable it may be for us to try to help people from far-away countries, I think that has to be a distinct second priority to the very urgent needs of people living in Ontario." — *Laura Eggertson, CMAJ*

**MSF arrests:** Two Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) workers in Sudan were arrested in late May and charged with crimes against the state, publishing false reports, spying and undermining the Sudanese society. MSF's head of mission, Paul Foreman (pictured below) of Britain, was arrested May 30 and Dutch citizen Vincent Hoedt, the regional coordinator for MSF in Darfur, was arrested May 31. Both were released but have to stay in the country. The charges relate to MSF's report, *The crushing burden of rape: sexual violence in Darfur*, which was published in March. "These arrests are totally unacceptable," says Geoff Prescott, general di-



MSF

rector of MSF-Holland. "As providers of medical assistance and as human beings we find it impossible to stay silent when we are witnessing these abuses — wherever they occur." The arrests undermine MSF's ability to provide humanitarian aid in Darfur, he added. MSF works in 29 locations in Darfur and has 180 expatriate and 3000 national staff providing health care and emergency aid in the Sudan.

**Viagra's downside?:** Health Canada is investigating reports of sudden peripheral vision loss or a worsening of vision among users of the erectile dysfunction drug sildenafil (Viagra, Cialis and Levitra). "We are investigating to see if there are scientific grounds for a class effect," says Health Canada's Jirina Vlk. A report should be ready this summer. Since 1999, 2 cases of visual impairment have been reported in Canada, but there is "no established link" to sildenafil. The US Food and Drug Administration is investigating 43 reports. Both the agency and Viagra's manufacturer, Pfizer Inc., say it's unclear whether the drug was actually associated with non-arteritic anterior ischemic optic neuropathy (NAION). A recent study (*J Neuroophthalmol* 2005; 1:9-13) looked at 14 men who experienced vision problems within 36 hours of taking sildenafil; the researchers concluded that sildenafil may provoke NAION in individuals with an arteriosclerotic risk profile. More than 23 million men worldwide have taken Viagra in the past 7 years, Pfizer reports. Sales topped \$1.68 billion in 2004. "There is no evidence showing that NAION occurred more frequently in men taking Viagra than in men of similar age and health who did not take Viagra," Pfizer said in a statement. — *Compiled by Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ.*