

Gefitinib warning: Access in the US to the lung cancer drug gefitinib (Iressa) has been limited to current users and those who previously found it effective. A trial comparing gefitinib with placebo in 1700 patients with non-small-cell lung cancer who had failed other courses of cancer therapy showed no survival benefit from taking the drug (the study will be posted at www.fda.gov). Gefitinib, manufactured by AstraZeneca, is one of a new generation of chemo-therapeutic agents aimed at specific molecular targets (*CMAJ* 2004;170:1765). Health Canada has decided to keep gefitinib on the market because “it has been shown to shrink tumours in some lung cancer patients, potentially reducing pain, and lessening cough and shortness of breath,” says spokesperson Jirina Vlk. In addition, this is the only therapeutic option “to treat advanced non-small-cell lung cancer patients who have not responded to 2 previous forms of chemotherapy.”

Task force resignations: All 8 members of the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care resigned June 20 due to a “lack of provincial and federal funding for the past 3 years.” The 29-year-old team of clinician-researchers systematically reviewed the evidence and made recommendations on preventive interventions. Their guidelines covered a wide range of topics including osteoporosis, hormone replacement therapy and breast cancer screening. Former task force chair Dr. John Freightner is working with the Public Health Agency of Canada and others to develop a new task force model to “ensure support is available to health care professionals and policymakers on health care issues affecting Canadians.” The College of Family Physicians Of Canada endorses this plan. “Family doctors rely on the clinical practice guidelines and recommendations of this task force,” CFPC President Dr. Alain Pavilanis stated.



Joey MacDonald

Halifax medical student Jordan Cavanaugh teaches basic anatomy to grade 4 children

Mini-med: A group of Halifax medical students are encouraging grade 4 students to adopt healthier lifestyles. In May, more than 170 Dalhousie University medical students in The Everest Project visited 1500 children in schools across the city (see photo). The children performed activities such as jumping jacks and were offered “mini” anatomy lessons on topics such as how our lungs work. Emphasized was the fact that exercising on a regular basis helps keep people healthy. The medical students insist they aren’t prepared to wait until they’re MDs before promoting preventive medicine. According to Joey MacDonald, president of the Dalhousie University’s Medical School Society, “By sharing our message with school-aged children we will help reduce the incidence of chronic disease in Nova Scotia for generations to come.” — *Dorothy Grant, Halifax*

CMAJ gold: *CMAJ* was awarded first prize for Best News Coverage at the Canadian Business Press’ recent Kenneth R. Wilson Awards. News Editors Laura Eggertson and Barbara Sibbald won Gold for their news article, “Hospitals battling outbreaks of *C. difficile*” (*CMAJ* 2004;171:19-21). A record-

breaking 700 entries in 20 categories were submitted to the 51-year-old competition honouring excellence in business and specialty publishing.

Drug sales: Sales of patented drugs increased by 7.9% (to total \$10.9 billion) from 2003 to 2004. This rate of growth is the lowest recorded since 1997/1996. Patentees reported spending \$1.17 billion on research and development in 2004, a decrease of 2% over the previous year.

MSF in Sudan: Charges have been dropped against 2 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) workers in Sudan. Following the release of the MSF report, *The crushing burden of rape: sexual violence in Darfur*. Paul Foreman and Vincent Hoedt were arrested in May for crimes against the state, publishing false reports, spying and undermining the Sudanese society (*CMAJ* 2005; 171:24). The Embassy of the Republic of Sudan in Ottawa stated that the charges were dropped due to Sudan’s “appreciation” of MSF’s medical services and MSF’s commitment to “focus and limit its activities on humanitarian work and obtain information from authorities concerned in the future.” — Compiled by *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*

DOI:10.1503/cmaj.050777