

## News @ a glance

**Shorter wait times:** Median wait times for hip surgeries in British Columbia are down 15% to 19 weeks in 2005–06 compared with the previous year, while wait times for knee surgery are down 12% to 25.6 weeks. The province has invested \$60.5 million in cutting wait times.

**Flashback:** The 20th anniversary of the Ontario doctors' strike over the province's ban on extra billing passed quietly last month. The Ontario Medical Association had labelled the legislation "an act of violence against the medical profession" and encouraged doctors to involve their patients in the dispute. But the job action was widely considered a public relations disaster for the association. While the OMA estimated that 75% to 80% of doctors were participating in the strike, which was called June 12 and officially called off July 7, government figures later showed that Ontario Health Insurance Plan billings dropped only 8% to 9% in June. The law, which brought Ontario into compliance with the 1984 Canada Health Act, passed on June 20. — Ann Silversides, Toronto

**Weed killer and cancer:** Canada's most popular weed killer, 2,4-D, is "persuasively linked" to cancer, neurological impairment and reproductive problems, according to a new study (*Paediatrics and Child Health* 2006;11:229–34). The Pest Management Regulatory Agency recently found 2,4-D does not cause cancer, but one of the study's authors, Meg Sears, says the federal agency examined different information than doctors. "They are looking at what happens in animals, and their information is largely proprietary," Sears told Canadian Press. NDP MP Pat Martin tabled a private member's bill Apr. 23, calling for a ban on the use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes. The Province of Quebec and some 90 Canadian municipalities have already instituted such a ban.

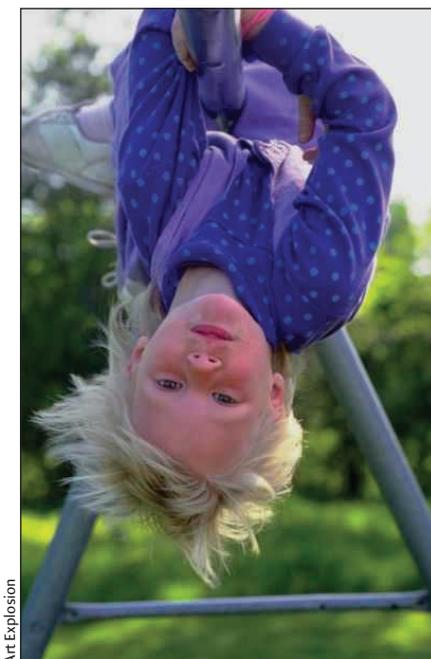
**Physician shortfall:** Nearly 4 million Canadians, or 14.3% of the population, didn't have a regular physician in 2005, according to Statistics Canada's Canadian Community Health Survey. In the 2003 survey, 14% of Canadian lacked a physician. Nova Scotia remains the province where the largest number of people have a regular physician (94.6%). Meanwhile, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario reports that only 11.4% of Ontario's family physicians are accepting new patients, down from 38.4% just 5 years ago. The college's survey also found that female physicians, who make up about one-third of the workforce, have increased their working hours; 50.9% worked 40 or more hours per week in 2005, up from 39% in 2004.

**Invest in healthy kids:** The Health Council of Canada is asking government to increase spending on childhood development and develop a pan-Canadian child and youth health strategy. A June 22 report indicates that 3% of Canadian children live with a disability or chronic illness, 14% have mental health issues, more than 1 million are overweight and another 500 000 are obese. In addition more than 40% of Aboriginal and new

immigrant families live in poverty (compared to a national average of 17%–18%). "It is less expensive and more effective to focus on the health of children, rather than to deal later with their chronic health conditions," said the council's Acting Chair Dr. Jeanne Besner.

**Canadian Cardiovascular Atlas:** Is there a geographic difference in cardiovascular disease in Canada? Award-winning research indicates an East-to-West gradient (highest in the East in term of burden and risk factors, then generally falling as one moves West). The Canadian Cardiovascular Outcomes Research Team (CCORT) has published a book and CD of articles from the peer-reviewed *Canadian Journal of Cardiology* ([www.cort.ca](http://www.cort.ca)) outlining the patterns of cardiovascular risk, disease and care across Canada. It is edited by Drs. Jack Tu, William Ghali, Louise Pilote and Susan Brien.

**New faces:** In June, Michael Decter stepped down as founding chairman of the Canada Health Council to pursue his interest in the environment. The council was set up nearly 3 years ago to oversee improvements to Canada's health care system. Vice-chair, Dr. Jeanne Besner is serving as acting chair. Also of note, Dr. Andrew Padmos has replaced Dr. Michael Brazeau as CEO at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. At the Medical Council, Dr. Ian Bowmer has replaced Dr. Dale Dauphinee as CEO, while at the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada, Dr. Nick Busing is the new president and CEO replacing former director Dr. David Hawkins, who is now Senior Editor, *CMAJ*. At the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council Suzanne Fortier, a scientist (crystallography) and long-time member of NSERC's governing council, is the first woman president in that 30-year-old organization's history. — Compiled by Barbara Sibbald, *CMAJ*



Art Explosion

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