

Briefly

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HIV recommendations: The World Health Organization (WHO) is calling for the use of more patient-friendly HIV drugs, earlier treatment for HIV-positive patients and prolonged use of antiretroviral drugs for HIV-positive mothers who are breastfeeding their infants. The new HIV recommendations say that use of antiretrovirals by HIV-positive mothers and infants can reduce mother-to-child transmission risk to 5% and improve child survival rates (www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2009/world_aids_20091130/en/index.html). WHO also recommends an early start to antiretroviral treatments for all HIV-positive patients, after studies found early therapy boosted the immune system, reduced rates of death and disease and lowered transmission rates. WHO is also asking countries to phase out the use of the antiretroviral drug stavudine due to its long term, irreversible side effects. — Lauren Vogel, Ottawa, Ont.

Fitness tax credit: Manitobans will have the chance to claim cash back on their crunches and push-ups, thanks to an adult fitness tax credit announced in the province's Nov. 30, 2009, throne speech (www.gov.mb.ca/throne.html). The province becomes the second, along with Nova Scotia, to extend a fitness tax credit to adults. The federal government implemented a children's fitness tax credit in 2007 allowing families to claim up to \$500 per child registered in a prescribed program of physical activity. — Lauren Vogel, Ottawa, Ont.

Foreign credentials framework: The federal government's new framework for recognizing the credentials of internationally trained workers will not include physicians until 2013. The new framework, announced Nov. 30, 2009, creates a one-year window in which foreign-trained professionals must be

informed whether their credentials will allow them to work within their profession in Canada. But the first phase of fast-tracking will only apply to 15 licensed professions, including pharmacists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, registered nurses and medical laboratory technologists. Physicians, licensed practical nurses and medical radiation technologists will not fall under the framework's umbrella until the end of 2012. Concerns have been expressed that the regime may compromise existing licensing processes and standards for accrediting foreign-trained physicians. — Lauren Vogel, Ottawa, Ont.

Bolstering the medical ranks: Attracting new students to family medicine, providing training opportunities to integrate foreign-trained doctors into the family physician workforce and offering financial incentives for doctors to take on additional patients are among measures needed to achieve the goals of improving primary care and supplying 95% of Canadians with a doctor by 2012, according to a new report. *The Wait Starts Here*, by the College of Family Physicians of Canada and the Canadian Medical Association ([www.cfpc.ca/local/files/Communications/News_Releases/PC_WTP%20FINAL%20-%20FINAL%20ENGLISH%20\(DEC%202009\).pdf](http://www.cfpc.ca/local/files/Communications/News_Releases/PC_WTP%20FINAL%20-%20FINAL%20ENGLISH%20(DEC%202009).pdf)), calls for physicians to improve patient flow with more efficient practice management procedures, such as prioritizing patient scheduling based on the severity of complaints. It also urges the establishment of guidelines for timely access to specialty care and access to health care in rural locations. — Lauren Vogel, Ottawa, Ont.

Disavowing handouts: India will become the next nation to crackdown on pharmaceutical industry handouts to physicians as Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad says the government will ban doctors from accepting freebies and for-

eign trips. Nabi Azad told the West Bengal Medical Association that Indian Medical Council (Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics) regulations will be amended to prohibit gifts from pharmaceutical or allied health care firms. India's crackdown is but the latest in the wake of concerns that industry handouts are increasingly influencing therapeutic decisions and compromising the medical profession's reputation, (*CMAJ* 2008. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.080780 and *CMAJ* 2008. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.081669). Although Canadian medical schools have varying policies toward industry handouts or, in some cases, no policies at all, administrators say there's no need for restrictive guidelines because the level of abuse isn't as severe as in other countries (*CMAJ* 2008. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.081008). — Lauren Vogel, Ottawa, Ont.

Olympic torch relay: Twenty doctors from across the country, including Canadian Medical Association President Dr. Anne Doig, carried the Olympic Torch on behalf of the CMA on Dec. 14, 2009 in Cornwall, Ontario, as part of the flame's 106-day journey across Canada. The CMA was invited to participate in the relay by a torch relay sponsor, Coca-Cola Ltd. A list of the 20 participants, chosen from among 450 doctors nominated by colleagues, is available at www.cma.ca/index.cfm/ci_id/89940/la_id/1.htm. — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

Outback bonuses: The Australian Medical Association Western Australia Branch is offering A\$3000 to anyone who persuades an overseas doctor to work down under. The branch offered the "finder's fee" in newspaper advertisements on Nov. 26, 2009. The conditions of the reward are that doctors have qualifications recognized in Australia and agree to work in the country for at least 12 months. It's hoped the initiative will attract 500 doctors and help alleviate the country's doctor shortage. The association hopes to recoup the cost of the

finder's fee from fees it charges institutions for recruiting doctors. The Rural Doctors Association of Australia has called the finder's fees misguided (www.rdaa.com.au/uploaded_documents/RDAA%20-%20Spotters%20fees%20-%2027Nov09.pdf). — Sabrina Doyle, Ottawa, Ont.

Standardized charts: The United Kingdom's General Medical Council says standardized national prescription charts could reduce errors. In a study commissioned by the council, doctors indicated that, while there will always be human slips, the likelihood of mistakes could be lowered by clear and standard forms. Researchers surveyed over 124 000 medication orders and found an error rate of 8.9% (www.gmc-uk.org/about/research/5155.asp). — Sabrina Doyle, Ottawa, Ont.

Target surpassed: Approximately 36 million people have been cured of tuberculosis and eight million deaths prevented as a consequence of Directly Observed Therapy Shortcourse (DOTS) programs over the course of the past 15 years, the World Health Organization (WHO) says. The international protocol for treating tuberculosis delivers a battery of drugs in prescribed order. Since the WHO's Stop TB Strategy was adopted, roughly 80% of treated patients have been cured but tuberculosis remains the second largest killer of people, after HIV/AIDS, and millions still lack access to high quality care (www.who.int/tb/strategy/en/). Among other elements, DOTS incorporates bacteriology-assisted case detection, standardized treatment and drug supply. — Sabrina Doyle, Ottawa, Ont.

Hospital incomes: United Kingdom Health Secretary Andy Burnham says as much as 10% of hospital income will be linked to patient satisfaction under a new payment system for the National Health Service. The strategy, *NHS 2010-15: from good to great. Preventative, people-centred, productive*, also proposed to abolish practice boundaries for general practitioners and floated the notion of job guarantees in exchange for wage restraint, (www.dh.gov.uk/prod

_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets@dh/@en/@ps/@sta/@perf/documents/digitalasset/dh_109887.pdf). — Wayne Kondro, CMAJ

Import centre: The United States Department of Homeland Security has opened a new centre to scrutinize food imports. The newly opened Commercial Targeting and Analysis Center for Import Safety, based in Washington, DC, will operate under the umbrella of Customs and Border Protection. "In addition to guarding against terrorism and crime, securing our borders and facilitating legitimate trade involve ensuring the safety of imported products," stated Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano in a press release. — Sabrina Doyle, Ottawa, Ont.

Polio vaccine: Roughly 2.8 million children under the age of five in southern and eastern Afghanistan will become the first in the world to receive a new bivalent oral polio vaccine under a program financed by the government of Canada. The new vaccine is aimed at protecting children against the two serotypes (1 and 3) of the polio virus that are found in Afghanistan. Although global polio incidence rates have decreased 99% over the past two decades — to 1483 around the world through mid-December 2009 from an estimated 365 000 in 1988 — Afghanistan is one of four countries, along with India, Nigeria and Pakistan, that have not stopped polio transmission. It's expected that the Global Polio Eradication Initiative will make the new vaccine available in those three other countries early in 2010. — Sabrina Doyle, Ottawa, Ont.

Sleep coincidences: As Philips Electronics India Limited, a subsidiary of the Netherlands-based Royal Philips Electronics, released a survey on Dec. 15, 2009 indicating that 93% of people in India are sleep deprived and 62% are at risk of sleep apnea, Philips Healthcare, another subsidiary of Royal Philips Electronics, announced that it will establish 130 sleep labs in the country by 2010. "There is almost no awareness about the sleep-related disorders in the country and Philips as

a company would be the first to initiate such campaigns in India," Chief Executive Officer Anjan Bose stated in a press release. — Wayne Kondro, CMAJ

Pharma mega-mergers: Mega-mergers valued at over US\$5 billion drove 63% of pharmaceutical industry sales growth during the period 1995–2014, according to the Datamonitor Group, a business information and market analysis firm (www.datamonitor.com/store/Product/big_pharma_mega_mergers_1995_2014?productid=DMHC2583). The firm's analysis of 14 years of company-reported sales and six years of company forecasts indicated that organic sales growth would increase from US\$84 billion in 1995 to US\$195 billion by 2014. But mergers and acquisitions activity boosted that amount to US\$381 billion, with the majority deals of more than US\$5 billion. — Sabrina Doyle, Ottawa, Ont.

Disclosure: Some 33 medical groups, including the American Medical Association, have been asked to disclose all of their financial backers by maverick Republican Senator Charles Grassley (Iowa). Grassley sent a letter of inquiry to each organization, asking that they reveal all funding from the pharmaceutical, medical device and insurance industries. "These organizations have a lot of influence over public policy, and people rely on their leadership. There's a strong case for disclosure and the accountability that results," Grassley said in a press release. — Sabrina Doyle, Ottawa, Ont.

Pet health widget: The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has unveiled a pet health and safety website widget to allow consumers to readily access information about how to care for animals during an emergency, report problems with pet foods or keep apprised of breaking news on veterinary drugs such as recall notices (www.fda.gov/PetHealthWidget). The widget can be embedded into any website or blog and allows users to access information issuing from the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine. — Lauren Vogel, Ottawa, Ont.

Faulty screenings: Nearly 40 women in Quebec with breast cancer received incorrect treatment due to faulty pathology tests in 2008, according to Yves Bolduc, the province's health minister. False negative tests issued for 87 breast cancer patients in Quebec in 2008 and 39 of them subsequently received improper treatment (communiqués.gouv.qc.ca/gouvqc/communiqués/GPQF/Decembre2009

[/16/c3698.html](http://16/c3698.html)). Five of those 39 women have since died, but it's unclear whether their deaths were caused by the incorrect treatment, Bolduc told a press conference on Dec. 16, 2009. — Lauren Vogel, Ottawa, Ont.

Organ transplant facts: There were 2083 solid organ transplants in Canada, as compared with 2188 in

2007, according to Canadian Organ Replacement Register statistics (http://cihi.ca/cihiweb/dispPage.jsp?cw_page=AR3230_E&cw_topic=3230). The total number of organ donors also decreased, to 1038 from 1046 in 2007. Roughly 4380 Canadians were on waiting lists for transplants as of Dec. 31, 2008. — Sabrina Doyle, Ottawa, Ont.

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