Briefly

Prescription drug abuse: Nearly 80% of British general practitioners suspect they've subscribed prescription drugs to patients who are addicted to those drugs and about 50% believe their patients are selling prescription drugs on the black market, according to a survey conducted by the United Kingdom's Family Doctor Association. The survey on the "Abuse of Prescription Drugs" also found that 43% of the 197 family doctors who were surveyed are "worried" about the abuse of prescription drugs ([www.family-doctor.org.uk/fckeditor/editor/filemanager/connectors/userfiles/file/2011/VoxDocs%20abuse%20of%20prescription%20drugs%20july%202011%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.family-doctor.org.uk/fckeditor/editor/filemanager/connectors/userfiles/file/2011/VoxDocs%20abuse%20of%20prescription%20drugs%20july%202011%20(2).pdf)). Their "main worry is elderly patients getting muddled and hoarding drugs, and patients sharing their own drugs with their relatives and friends for their aches and pains as well as their own." — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

Start from scratch: The highly respected United States Institute of Medicine threw a summer spanner into the machinery of the US Food and Drug Administration's process for regulating "moderate-risk" medical devices such as artificial hips by arguing that it completely fails to examine the efficacy and safety of such devices before they are put on the market. Among the conclusions drawn by an Institute of Medicine panel in its report, *Medical Devices and the Public's Health: the FDA 510(k) Clearance Process at 35 Years*, was that the process "is not intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of medical devices with some exceptions. The 510(k) process cannot be transformed into a premarket evaluation of safety and effectiveness as long as the standard for clearance is substantial equivalent to any previously cleared device" (http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=13150&page=5). — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

Northern health funding: Prime Minister Stephen Harper has announced that the federal government will extend the Territorial Health System Sustainability Initiative for two years, which will yield \$60 million for the nation's three territories to maintain such health programs as one that offsets medical transportation expenses. "The North's greatest resource is the people who live and work here. The support being announced today is yet another concrete way that our Government is improving the health of Northerners," Harper said in a press release (<http://pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?category=1&featureId=6&pageId=26&id=4291>). "This is about working with the territories to ensure Northern families can get the medical attention they need near their homes thereby reducing the costs, time and travel of being treated further south." — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

Vaccine safety review: A literature review of the health problems associated with vaccines has found that while some vaccines can cause such side effects as seizures, inflammation of the brain and fainting, such effects occur very rarely. But there's no conclusive evidence that vaccines cause allergic reactions and temporary joint pain, and absolutely no evidence that there is a link between immunization and either autism or type 1 diabetes, according to the review conducted by a United States Institute of Medicine expert panel on behalf of the Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13164). "The findings should be reassuring to parents that few health problems are clearly connected to immunizations, and these effects occur relatively rarely. And repeated study has made clear that some health problems are not caused by vaccines," Ellen Wright Clayton, committee chair and professor of pediatrics and law, and director, Center for Biomedical Ethics

and Society at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, said in a press release (www8.nationalacademies.org/onpinews/newsitem.aspx?RecordID=13164). — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

Orthopedic walk reinstated: After a three-year hiatus, the Canadian Orthopedic Foundation will this month relaunch its bone and joint campaign — "Hip Hip Hooray!" — which raised more than \$18 million for bone and joint health initiatives between 1992 and 2008. Proceeds from this year's walk will go toward the production and distribution of educational resources as well as a peer support program that matches orthopedic patients with former patients who have undergone similar surgeries (www.hiphiphooray.org/). The fundraising walk will be held in communities across Canada Sept. 21–25 and participants will include those who have regained mobility after orthopedic surgery, as well as friends and family. — Erin Walkinshaw, Ottawa, Ont.

Annual Pap tests unnecessary: Women should undergo Pap tests only once every three years, rather than annually, the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency advises. Approximately 80% of cervical cancers, which are generally caused by human papilloma virus, can be prevented with regular Pap tests, but the agency says annual screening is unnecessary for most women. As well, agency guidelines as of next January will recommend an increase in the age at which women should start getting tested. "Until recently we encouraged women to have a yearly Pap test starting at the age of 18," Dr. Betsy Brydon, medical advisor for the agency's prevention program for cervical cancer, said in a press release. "But scientific research and studies have shown there to be very little additional protection by performing the tests in the teen years" (www.saskcancer.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=483,13,10,1,Docu

ments&MediaID=5f193058-f7e8-4355-a863-3019c20e2e9b&Filename=nsrls+Pap+test+guidelines.pdf). The agency will recommend that women start being tested at age 21, or three years after becoming sexually active, whichever is later. — Lauren Vogel, *CMAJ*

Google forfeits online pharmacy revenues: Popular search engine Google Inc. has forfeited US\$500 million to the United States Department of Justice for allowing online Canadian pharmacies to target American consumers through its AdWords program, resulting in the unlawful importing of foreign prescription drugs into the country. The forfeiture, one of the largest in US history, represents the total revenue Google received as a result of Canadian pharmacies advertising through AdWords, plus the total revenue made by the pharmacies in sales to American customers, the department reports (www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2011/August/11-dag-1078.html). The importing of prescription drugs to consumers is unlawful because the US Food and Drug Administration cannot ensure the safety and effectiveness of foreign drugs, or control whether the drugs have been dispensed in accordance with a valid prescription. — Lauren Vogel, *CMAJ*

Mobile blood pressure monitoring: Patients suspected of having high blood pressure should be given home monitoring devices to avoid misdiagnosis because of jitters experienced while being tested in doctors' offices, says the United Kingdom's National Institute for Health and Clinical Evidence (NICE) in new hypertension guidelines (www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/13561/56008/56008.pdf). The updated guidelines recommend that diagnoses of hypertension be made using 24-hour ambulatory blood pressure monitoring, which involves patients wearing mobile devices that record numerous blood pressure measurements throughout the day and night. At-home, continuous monitoring will help avoid the "white coat effect," where patients experience temporary increases in blood pressure simply because they're nervous visiting the doctor, stated NICE in a press release (www.nice.org.uk/newsroom/news/CallsFor24HourBloodPressureMonitoringInRadicalUpdateToNICEGuidelines.jsp). The institute estimates up to a quarter of patients experience this effect. Clinical management of hypertension is one of the most common interventions in primary care in the UK, accounting for some £1 billion in drug costs in 2006 alone. — Lauren Vogel, *CMAJ*

Sick kid index: Countries with extreme health care worker shortages are the most dangerous places on earth for ill children, according to a health index from the charity Save The Children (www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/HEALTH-WORKER-INDEX-2011.PDF). Sick children are five times more likely to die in the bottom 20 countries on the index. Some of the bottom-ranked countries have an average of 7 doctors, nurses and midwives per 10 000 people. The United States, by contrast, has about 125 health workers per 10 000 people. "The global health worker crisis is costing children's lives every day. All the vaccines, lifesaving drugs and preventive care mean nothing when there are no skilled health workers to deliver them to the children who need them most," Mary Beth Powers, chief of Save the Children's newborn and child survival campaign, said in a press release (www.savethechildren.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=8rKLIXMGIpI4E&b=6478593&ct=11207615¬oc=1). Chad and Somalia were the lowest-ranked countries on the index; Switzerland and Finland ranked the highest. — Roger Collier, *CMAJ*

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