

Briefly

Will that be fries with your echocardiogram?: In a bid to bolster attendance during the World Cup of cricket, officials with the Cricket Association of Bengal are offering free medical check-ups to fans who purchase tickets worth more than 750 rupees for games not involving the host nation at the Eden Gardens Stadium in Kolkata, India. “We have decided to do something benevolent for the spectators. Our president is in talks with private hospitals and health centres to put the plan into practice,” Cricket Association of Bengal joint secretary Sujan Mukherjee told *The Indian Express* (www.indianexpress.com/news/no-cricket-fever-eden-organises-checkup-to-provoke-symptoms/754110/). “Everything put together, and with the incentive added, we expect an attendance of over 40,000,” for the matches between South Africa and Ireland, the Netherlands and Ireland, and Zimbabwe and Kenya, Mukherjee added.

The importance of being social: Playing bingo, attending church services, volunteer work, day trips and other forms of social activity make the elderly twice as likely to remain free of disability, a new study says. Social activity could benefit the neural networks and musculoskeletal functions required to maintain independence, the study suggests (<http://biomedgerontology.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2011/02/07/gerona.gdq231.full.pdf+html>). “Social activity has long been recognized as an essential component of healthy aging, but now we have strong evidence that it is also related to better everyday functioning and less disability in old age,” lead researcher Bryan James, a postdoctoral fellow in the epidemiology of aging and dementia at the Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, Illinois said in a press release (www.rush.edu/webapps/MEDREL/servlet/NewsRelease?id=1471). “The findings are exciting because social activity is potentially a risk factor that can be modified to help

older adults avoid the burdens of disability.”

Fox in the henhouse: British Prime Minister David Cameron’s proposal to make general practitioners (GPs) responsible for determining how more than £80 billion is spent in National Health Service budgets is a recipe for disaster as doctors can be expected to use large chunks of that cash to give themselves generous pay raises, the United Kingdom’s union for health service staff charges. “There is a proven track record of top people paying themselves higher incomes as soon as they get control of the money. It happens in the privatised water, gas and electricity sectors as it happens in the banks. Salary levels of GPs are likely to escalate towards the stratospheric levels we see in the USA,” Rehana Azam, the union’s national officer said in a press release (www.gmb.org.uk/newsroom/latest_news/gmb_warns_on_top_nhs_pay.aspx). Union data indicates that doctors earned between £83 000 and £107 000 after expenses in 2008–09, depending on which strategic health authority they were employed by. Cameron has proposed replacing primary care trusts and strategic health authorities with general practitioner consortia.

Fake medicines directive: The European Parliament has approved new legislation to crack down on counterfeit drug makers and Internet sales of fake drugs. “Falsified medicines are silent killers, either because they are devoid of effect or because they contain toxic substances that may harm, or even kill, those who take them. The absence of a legal framework encourages counterfeiting, an organized crime. We have been witnessing a huge growth of this criminal activity, with an increase of 400% in seizures of fake drugs since 2005. Protecting patient safety is the core aim of this directive,” Marisa Matias, Confederal Group of the Euro-

pean United Left - Nordic Green Left member for Portugal said in a press release (www.europarl.europa.eu/en/pressroom/content/20110215IPR13734/html/template.jsp). The European Parliament estimated that about 1% of drugs now sold on the continent are falsified. Among measures being contemplated are special “serialization numbers” that can read by pharmacies to determine if a product is authentic.

Yankees 34 Canucks 24: The prevalence of obesity among adults in the United States was more than 10 percentage points higher than in Canada, according to a detailed analysis conducted for the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Culling data from the *Canadian Health Measures Survey 2007-2009*, the *Canadian Heart Health Survey 1986-1992* and the *US National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 1988-1994 and 2007-08*, the study concludes that 24.1% of Canadian adults are obese, as compared with 34.4% of Americans. “Among men, the prevalence of obesity was over 8 percentage points lower in Canada than in the United States (24.3% compared with 32.6%) and among women, more than 12 percentage points lower (23.9% compared with 36.2%),” states the study, *Adult Obesity Prevalence in Canada and the United States* (www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db56.pdf).

Nuclear hub: The government of Saskatchewan has announced that it will spend \$30 million over seven years to create a research centre for nuclear medicine and nuclear sciences at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. “In the early 1950’s, scientists at the University of Saskatchewan pioneered the use of Cobalt 60 for cancer treatment,” Premier Brad Wall stated in a press release (www.gov.sk.ca/news?newsId=d5453e12-8e41-4f30-a9af-1cd0c5bae957). “Today we are taking another important step in re-capturing that international leadership position in

nuclear medicine and expanding it to include research in materials science and small reactor design.”

White-coat effect: The United Kingdom’s National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence is proposing changes to its clinical guidelines on hypertension to say people shouldn’t be diagnosed with high blood pressure until they’ve been monitored at home for 24 hours to offset the stress associated with visiting a doctor’s office or a hospital. “If the first and second blood pressure measurements taken during a consultation are both 140/90 mmHg or higher, offer 24-hour ambulatory blood pressure monitoring (ABPM) to confirm the diagnosis of hypertension,” states the draft guidance, *Hypertension: the clinical management of primary hypertension in adults* (www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/12167/53228/53228.pdf). “This new approach would not only improve diagnosis but would ultimately be cost-saving for the NHS [National Health Service],” Dr. Bryan Williams, professor of medicine at the University of Leicester and chair of the guideline development group said in a press release (www.nice.org.uk/media/4D1/E1/2011026HypertensionConsultation.pdf).

Diet talks: Canada’s health ministers will launch a “national conversation” to identify means of curbing childhood obesity. “Areas of discussion will include making our social and physical environments more supportive of physical activity and healthy eating, identifying and addressing obesity risks in children early, increasing access to nutritious foods and decreasing the marketing of foods and beverages high in fat, sugar and/or sodium to children,” the government said in announcing the creation of “A National Dialogue on Healthy Weights” (www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/media/nr-rp/2011/2011_0307-eng.php). “Unhealthy weight is a significant public health concern that requires attention from many sectors of society,” said federal Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq. “The Harper Government is helping to kick-start this national dialogue to help identify ways we can work together to promote and maintain healthy weights for children and youth. Everyone has a role to play in helping children and youth live a healthy life.”

The perils of home renovation: Home energy renovations and retrofits can be pose significant health risks for children, particularly by exposing them to

high levels of lead, which as been linked to a variety of behavioural problems, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, hyperactivity and aggression, according to a study by the Canadian Environmental Law Association. “Solid evidence confirms that, compared with adults, children are at greater risk from exposure to environmental contaminants, particularly those that occur indoors where children spend most of their time. Numerous factors, including children’s higher respiratory and metabolic rates, their behaviours such as hand-to-mouth activity and the vulnerability of their developing brains and other organ systems, contribute to this greater risk. As well, the developing fetus is especially vulnerable, highlighting the need to limit maternal exposure to contaminants,” states the study, *Healthy Retrofits: The Case for Better Integration of Children’s Environmental Health Protection into Energy Efficiency Programs* (www.cela.ca/sites/cela.ca/files/CELA773-Healthy-Retrofits-report.pdf). Among recommendations is one that pregnant women never be involved in home renovations. — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

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