

Canada “behind eight ball” in fighting youth smoking

Canada is lagging far behind other countries in preventing youth smoking, a Nova Scotia pediatrician says. Dr. Andrew Lynk notes that 29% of his province’s teens smoke, while the comparable rate in California is only 7%. “We’re way behind the eight ball,” says Lynk.

He says Canada spends only 67 cents per capita on smoking prevention, a fraction of the amount that some American states invest (see *CMAJ* 2001; 164[6]:855). Shortly after Lynk made the comments to *CMAJ*, Ottawa announced \$422 million in new funding for antitobacco initiatives, to be spent over 5 years. The main goals are to reduce the proportion of people who smoke to 20% from 25%, and to reduce cigarette sales by 30%. Despite the new spending, the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) is urging physicians to back the Tobacco Youth Protection Act, which would impose a 19-cent levy on each pack of cigarettes and raise an estimated \$360 million annually — \$12 per capita — for programs to reduce youth tobacco use. Ottawa collects \$2.4 billion in tobacco taxes annually but until this year has invested only \$20 million of that in antismoking campaigns. The



Time to target young smokers?

CPS wants physicians to “vigorously” lobby politicians to adopt the act (www.cps.ca). “We must persist until we see unequivocal action,” says Lynk.

The act, crafted by Senators Colin Kenny and Pierre Claude Nolin, is now being considered by the Senate and may be presented to Parliament later this year. If the bill passes, the levy will be adminis-

tered by an arm’s-length foundation. Kenny insists that his act would direct much more money at antismoking efforts than Ottawa plans to spend. “The government believes it can shadowbox with this problem,” adds Kenny, “but a knockout punch is needed.”

A similar bill was presented to the Commons in 1998 but was struck down on a technicality, which has now been eliminated. “The impact of these programs will be on par with that of vaccinations, clean water and seat belts,” Lynk told *CMAJ*. — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*

Edmonton scoops foreign-trained nurses

Canada is already scooping up doctors from South Africa, and now Edmonton is recruiting New Zealand’s nurses. The city is already well on its way to recruiting 250 registered nurses overseas, most of them in New Zealand. Sixty-one nurses have already accepted offers from the Capital Health Region, and another 114 have applied. Executive nursing officer Wendy Hill is “quite optimistic” the region will meet its recruiting target. The recruiting effort is considered an interim measure while Alberta builds up its health care workforce, partly by increasing enrolment in its nursing and medical schools.

The 1-year contracts offered to the recruits appear to be a popular feature for the nurses, who receive temporary permits before having to sit their Canadian exams. Hill said the chief advantage of hiring nurses in New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom is that the new arrivals are able to begin work with minimal orientation. New Zealand’s health care system is being hit particularly hard by foreign recruiters, since many of its young physicians head to Australia to practise (see *CMAJ* 2001;164[1]:80).

The region has also attracted 90 new Alberta-trained nurses through a mentoring program. These nurses, whose positions are above the regular complement, work with an experienced colleague for a year and are then offered regular positions. Without the program, says Hill, many of these new nurses would have headed to the US. The association representing Alberta nurses did not have data on the number of nurses who have left for the US. — *Heather Kent, Vancouver*

A cigarette pack that talks the talk

Just as Canadians get used to new cigarette packages with larger and more dire full-colour warnings about the hazards of tobacco, a new warning method is on the horizon. The *New Scientist* says a patent has been filed for a talking cigarette packet “that recites a firm health warning on opening.” The potential messages range from a funeral march to health warnings “in any of several languages.” Should Canada consider some new warning methods of its own, given its continuing high smoking rate? Let *CMAJ*’s editor know (hoeyj@cma.ca). We’ll publish the best suggestions in our Holiday Review in December. — *CMAJ*