

Ten health stories that mattered: Jan. 20–24

- A laptop containing the unencrypted personal health information of some 620 000 Albertans was stolen last September, announced Health Minister Fred Horne. Although Medi-centres Family Health Care Clinics in Edmonton reported the theft to police and the province's privacy commissioner in October 2013, health officials were informed on Jan. 21, nearly four months later.
- Recent federal rule changes will place more pressure on doctors to authorize medical marijuana use, warned the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba. The new rules allow physicians to dispense as well as prescribe the drug — a task the organization says most Manitoba doctors oppose.
- Ontario will spend \$6 million to expand paramedic services, announced Health Minister Deb Matthews. In a bid to prevent unnecessary emergency department visits and premature admission to long-term care, paramedics will visit seniors who are known to make frequent calls for emergency services.
- Quebec nurses will not need a university degree to work in hospitals, said Health Minister Réjean Hébert. The order representing Quebec nurses asked the province in 2012 to require members of the profession to hold a baccalaureate in nursing, but a working group studying the proposal failed to reach a consensus.
- A Nova Scotia group that speaks for people with intellectual disabilities called for a meeting with federal Justice Minister Peter MacKay, saying that people with special needs are too often charged for aggressive behaviour that should be dealt with outside the criminal justice system.
- A new kind of medical tourism has come to light in which Calgary surgeons who work in the public system are now also practising private medicine in the Caribbean. The physicians, who say there are too many surgeons and too few operating rooms in Alberta's public system, fly out with their patients to perform shoulder, knee, hip and other operations.
- Half of British Columbians have not had a flu shot this year, according to a new poll. Fifty-eight percent of adults polled did not get the shot this season, with a majority citing a belief that the possible adverse effects of being inoculated are worse than catching the flu.
- Canada ranked last among 11 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries in terms of how quickly patients can access care, the Health Council of Canada showed in a report. Only 31%–46% of Canadians, depending on the province, could get an appointment the same day or the next day, not including emergency department visits.
- Health Canada research library changes have left scientists scrambling to access research, according to a report obtained by CBC News. The scientists say information has become increasingly difficult to access since the main library closed and retrieval was outsourced to a private company.
- Doctors in Nova Scotia may soon be asking patients how much money they earn in order to refer low-income patients toward supports. Dr. Monika Dutt, the medical officer of health with the Cape Breton District Health Authority, is developing a tool that would help doctors ask about a patient's finances and redirect them to get help. — Lauren Vogel, *CMAJ*

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