



REALITYBITES

News from home & around the world



Advocacy alert

Many BCPWA members have received a letter from the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance reviewing reporting obligations. The Ministry wants people to report all changes to income, however the Act and Regulations state that you must report only income earned over \$500 and changes to family unit. If you have concerns about reporting, please contact BCPWA's Advocacy Department at 604.893.2223.

Electronic record sharing may erect barriers to treatment

Almost two-thirds of HIV and sexual health clinic attendees questioned about electronic patient records (EPR) and record sharing don't want their physician informed of their visit, according to the results of a Scottish study recently published online in the journal, *Sexually Transmitted Infections*.

Investigators from the New Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh, Scotland sought to examine patient attitudes to the current trend towards the sharing of patient information across the National Health Service (NHS).

The study suggests that without substantial patient education, establishing EPR and wider record sharing may inadvertently erect barriers to HIV and STI testing and treatment, since one-in-four respondents said that they that they would be less likely to attend sexual health clinics if electronic sharing of their sexual health records occurred.

Source: www.aidsmap.com

Detox centre at InSite

The injection drug users of downtown Vancouver have a new ally in the fight to

get clean. InSite, Vancouver's supervised injection facility, has opened a detox centre with 12 beds, private bathrooms, a nurse, and a counsellor. "People are being treated humanely," says director Mark Townsend.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper opposes it, however, and the government will decide its fate in June 2008. Show your support at www.communityinsite.ca/support.html.

Source: www.poz.com

HIV infection and childhood vaccines

A new study conducted in Cameroon and the Central African Republic has found that HIV-negative and HIV-positive infants born to mothers infected with the virus had lower than normal levels of antibodies from childhood vaccines, *Science Daily* reports.

The study, coordinated by the Institut Pasteur in Paris, examined children ages 18 months to 36 months. Researchers found that HIV-positive children had particularly low levels of measles vaccine antibodies. HIV-negative children born to HIV-infected mothers also had lower than expected levels. The results suggest that children born to HIV-positive mothers may need adapted vaccine schedules.

Source: www.poz.com

Medical marijuana restrictions unfair, say lawyers

The federal government must loosen unfair restrictions that are preventing seriously ill Canadians from obtaining the medical marijuana they need to treat their debilitating illnesses, lawyers for the sick have argued in Federal Court in Toronto.

Licensed medical marijuana users are suing Health Canada over its rules regarding the growing of the drug and its distribution.

Health Canada has effectively established itself as the country's sole legal provider of medical marijuana, but is providing an expensive yet ineffective drug that doesn't meet the needs of many patients who use it to treat chronic pain, seizures and other ailments, Alan Young, an Osgoode Hall Law School professor said.

There are providers who want to supply various strains of the drug at a lower cost for medical use, but they're prohibited from doing so because government policy restricts them from supplying more than one patient, he added.

Source: *The Canadian Press*

HIV infection drastically enhanced by semen ingredient

A plentiful ingredient found in human semen drastically enhances the ability of the HIV virus to cause infection, according to a report in the December 14, 2007, issue of the journal *Cell*. The findings suggest a potential new target for preventing the spread of AIDS, the researchers said.

Collaborating research groups in Hannover and Ulm, Germany, show that naturally occurring fragments of so-called prostatic acidic phosphatase (PAP) isolated from human semen form tiny fibres known as amyloid fibrils. Those fibrils capture HIV particles and help them to penetrate target cells, thereby enhancing the infection rate by up to several orders of magnitude.

"We were not expecting to find an enhancer, and were even more surprised about the strength," said Frank Kirchhoff

continued on next page



REALITYBITES

News from home & around the world



of the University Clinic of Ulm. "Most enhancers have maybe a two- or three-fold effect, but here the effect was more than 50-fold and, under certain conditions, more than 100,000-fold."

Source: www.medicalnewstoday.com

Need for ARVs that restore immune function

New data on cancer rates among HIV-positive people underline the need for the development of antiretroviral drugs that restore immune function more effectively than currently available treatments, according to Mark Wainberg, director of McGill University's AIDS Centre at the Jewish General Hospital in Montreal, in a recent *Washington Post* opinion piece.

As a result of increased life expectancy because of new antiretrovirals, clinicians and researchers are seeing higher rates of several life-threatening cancers among people who have been HIV-positive for long periods of time, Wainberg writes.

He adds that although the numbers are still relatively small overall, these cancers are occurring with far higher frequency among PWAs than among the general population. One reason for the increase is that HIV causes a decline in immunological function that can't be completely repaired by antiretrovirals, according to Wainberg.

Source: www.kaisernetwork.org

Money for community programs in Ontario slashed

Federal funding for community AIDS programs in Ontario is being slashed as the Conservative government readjusts overall spending and redirects money to

a Bill Gates AIDS vaccine initiative it announced earlier last year. Money that helps prevent local organizations stem the spread of the virus and provide support to those infected is being reduced by 30 per cent across the province. Ontario was targeted because its funding cycle is different than that of other provinces, federal health officials explained, and much of the money for special projects had not been allocated as it had been elsewhere in the country.

When the money for the \$139-million Canadian HIV Vaccine Initiative was announced last February, a federal news release boasted that "Canada's new government and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have committed major new funding." In fact, approximately \$26-million of the government's portion had been redirected from other AIDS projects, including the community programs in Ontario.

Source: *The Globe and Mail*

One HIV subtype more deadly than others

Two studies led by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found that people infected with HIV in Thailand die from the disease significantly sooner than those with HIV living in other parts of the world. According to the researchers, the shorter survival time measured in the studies suggests that HIV subtype E, which is the most common HIV subtype in Thailand, may be more virulent than other subtypes of the virus.

The first study followed 228 men over a 14-year period starting in 1991. Researchers compared them to a group

of similar HIV-positive men living in North America and Europe who were included in another study. The median time from HIV infection to death for the Thai men was 7.8 years compared to 11 years for HIV-positive men living in North America and Europe.

For the second study, researchers followed a small group of male blood donors and their wives from 1992 to 2007. The median survival rate from infection to death was 7.8 years for the men and 9.6 years for the women.

Source: www.sciencedaily.com

Increase in HIV/AIDS cases in China

The number of HIV/AIDS cases on mainland China increased by an average of 3,000 monthly between January 2006 and June 2007, according to the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

By November, 2007, 32,235 new HIV/AIDS cases had been recorded for the year and about 3,000 people had died of AIDS-related causes since January 2007. About 38 percent of new HIV diagnoses were transmitted sexually, an increase of 30 percent from 2006. In addition, about 3 percent of new cases were transmitted among men who have sex with men.

The government estimates that 220,000 people nationwide were living with HIV/AIDS at the end of September; however, UNAIDS estimated that that number at about 650,000 people.

Source: www.kaisernetwork.org ⊕