



Ramsay, the pharmacist who got the Hug Your Heart idea rolling.

Dr. Wilbert Keon, director general of the University of Ottawa Heart Institute, said that in the past 25 years the proportion of women patients at the institute has risen from 7% to 30%. He said research indicates that once coronary artery disease has been diagnosed in a woman, she is more likely to die of it than a man and less likely to survive surgery. Despite that grim news little research being done on female cardiovascular disease, even though most doctors now recognize that their symptoms can be dramatically different from men's.

Hug Your Heart organizers Jay Acton and Barbara Ramsay hope the Ottawa event will serve as a blueprint for similar events, sponsored by the Women's Television Network. During the low-fat luncheon, Ramsay un-

derlined the importance of building momentum. "In 12 months we will have said goodbye to another 37 000 mothers, sisters, daughters, partners, wives and employees because of heart disease." More information is available from Acton, 613 761-8475. — © *Charlotte Gray*

Liposuction making inroads

The Canadian Society of Plastic Surgeons reports that liposuction is now the most common cosmetic procedure practised by Canadian plastic surgeons. Approximately 10 000 of the procedures are now conducted annually and more than 85% of patients are women. The society says liposuction is not a substitute for weight loss. Instead, it is a "contouring procedure" for removing fatty deposits that are resistant to diet and exercise.

Potential savings through drugs?

Alberta's newsletter on drug use in the elderly (DUE) recommends a more integrated system of funding health care so that savings realized in 1 sector can offset potential increases in another. The *DUE Quarterly* cites low-molecular-weight heparin therapy as an effective, safe and less costly therapy than traditional intravenous heparin therapy for the treatment of proximal vein thrombosis in elderly patients. Although increasing use of the therapy may increase financial pressures on drug-benefit budgets, the newsletter says it could lead to potential savings in the hospital sector. The newsletter is a joint effort of the Alberta Medical Association and Alberta Pharmaceutical Association.

Research Update • Le point sur la recherche

BSE and Britain's CJD outbreak: definitive link established

Two studies provide the best evidence to date that bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and "new variant" Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD) are the same disease and that vCJD is caused by exposure to BSE (*Nature* 1997;390:448 and 498).

Two research teams studying BSE, vCJD, other animal spongiform encephalopathies and sporadic human cases of CJD arrived at the same conclusion from different directions. One team injected strains of mice with brain tissue from victims of a variety of spongiform encephalopathies. In mice infected with BSE or vCJD, a characteristic set of symptoms developed after the same incubation period, and the

disease attacked the brain in a similar way. Taken together, these characteristics were called the "BSE signature." Animals infected with other spongiform encephalopathies and with sporadic human CJD did not have the BSE signature, indicating that they are distinct from BSE/vCJD.

The other team developed a biochemical analytic method to examine strains of prions (aberrant proteins) in the brains of infected transgenic mice. This evidence also supports the link between BSE and vCJD, and indicates that sporadic CJD is not the same disease. Additional important findings also emerged.

- Other well-known animal spongiform encephalopathies, including the sheep disease scrapie, are distinct from BSE/vCJD, making it unlikely that BSE is

caused by exposure to scrapie.

- Unusual recent cases of spongiform encephalopathy in British cats and exotic zoo animals fit the BSE signature, meaning that the disease may be capable of infecting many species.
- The BSE signature was produced in mice infected with tissue from other animals, such as pigs, that had been infected with tissue from cattle with BSE.
- Two dairy farmers who died of CJD during the outbreak appear to have had sporadic CJD rather than vCJD.

The studies didn't indicate the incubation period of BSE/vCJD in humans, although in mice it is a little longer than a year, shorter than the period for other transmissible encephalopathies. As well, the studies do not reveal how, or how easily, the disease is transmitted. — *C.J. Brown*