



Ontario's Hamilton Health Sciences Centre is playing a key role, for once the Chinese hospital is operating the Hamilton site will act as a telemedicine consulting base. John Tegenfeldt, CEO with the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board who will assume the same post with the Chinese hospital in December, says specialized radiological images may be sent to Hamilton for interpretation, with the Canadian hospital functioning as a "tertiary referral centre."

Down the road, Canadian doctors can expect more employment opportunities in China. Interhealth Canada China Inc. has been licensed to build 8 primary care medical centres in other cities, including Shanghai. All of the sites have a local population of at least 3 million people, as well as significant numbers of expatriates. — © Heather Kent

## Impact of national pharmacare plan studied

A fully funded, comprehensive and publicly administered national pharmacare program would increase public spending on prescription drugs by about \$4.3 billion per year, a study completed for the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association of Canada has revealed. The study, released at the PMAC's annual meeting this fall, indicated that prescription drugs cost Canadians about \$6.8 billion in 1996, with provincial drug plans covering 44% of the cost. "Overall," said the study, "the best opportunity for a national pharmacare program is a combined public/private plan with a 25% copayment, as is the case in Quebec, or a plan in which the patient pays the dispensing fee. In both cases the impact on public and private plans is an increase of less than 10%." The National Forum on Health proposed the introduction of a national plan last February, and the idea is currently being considered by the federal government.

## Religious leaders give organ donation a boost

In an unprecedented display of unity, leaders from different religious communities rose and signed a giant organ-donor card at the Ottawa headquarters of the Kidney Foundation of Canada in October. Those affixing their names included Roman Catholic Archbishop Marcel Gervais, Rabbi Reuven Bulka, Dr. Madhu Sahasrabudhe of the Hindu community, Dr. Mukhtar Malik, president of the Ottawa Muslim Association, and Quasem Mahmud, chair of the Islamic Schools Federation of Ottawa. In all, 10 religious leaders signed the card.

The foundation says the initiative comes at a crucial time because hospitals are reporting a critical shortage of donated organs. "At the same time," says the foundation, "people on long waiting lists are dying every day. We believe that people often decide against signing their donor cards because doing so will deny them a proper religious burial or will somehow be against their religion."

The foundation, which says about 16% of Canadians consider their religion a barrier to organ donation, hope the signatures will help to "dispel a widespread myth that donating organs is contrary to religious beliefs."

"This is the best thing you can do with your life — to save someone else's life," Bulka told the *Ottawa Sun*. "We want to escalate this to the point where it's not even a choice — it is a duty of the individual." Gervais, whose niece is an organ recipient, agreed that some people worry that religion frowns upon organ donation. "I don't understand it," he said.

## Things aren't always as they appear

*Member's Dialogue*, a publication of the College of Physicians and Sur-

geons of Ontario, says many physicians are grappling over whether to review surveillance videotapes made by insurance companies when they complete independent medical examinations (IME) in injury cases. The college says videotapes present potential pitfalls, which range from questions about the actual identity of the subject if the tape is poorly recorded to viewing videotapes after conducting the IME, thereby eliminating the patient's chance to explain or clarify its contents.

Dr. John Carlisle, the college's deputy registrar, says physicians who do not feel they are experienced enough to interpret videotaped material or are unsure how it was made may refuse to comment on it. Physicians who screen videotaped material should tell patients the evidence will be part of their assessment.

## Shortage of re-entry positions tackled on East Coast

Nova Scotia has approved a proposal to provide additional postgraduate specialty training for physicians already in practice, with 12 new positions being made available annually at Dalhousie University. The shortage of postgraduate positions has caused numerous complaints across Canada because physicians who want additional training have found themselves locked out of the system because new graduates are taking up all available training slots. *Pulse*, the newsletter of the Medical Society of Prince Edward Island, says that province is trying to determine if any island physicians wish to apply for the Nova Scotia positions, which will be available at Dalhousie University. Approval of funding for a position, which will cost \$38 000 a year, will not be approved by the PEI government until an area of need had been identified.