



During that period, the AIDS Committee was working with health officials, schools, churches and organizations in Conception Bay North to establish community-based AIDS awareness programs. "This was the first major outbreak among heterosexuals and it turned our education programs around completely," says Yetman. "We had to take a whole different approach — instead of targeting gay men, we had to reach a much wider audience, particularly young people."

Several HIV-positive women from Conception Bay North, and notably Trudy Parsons, took on public roles in the education campaign. Parsons, who was infected by her boyfriend while still in her teens, spoke regularly in schools and appeared in a documentary about HIV and AIDS among young people. (She is no longer involved in AIDS education.)

"The work that Trudy did in the schools took down barriers," Yetman recalls. "She changed the minds of a lot of young people — she convinced them that AIDS was not a gay disease, because [now] it had touched someone just like them."

The AIDS Committee plans to meet with the province's health minister to discuss ways to provide AIDS education to other populations at risk, particularly young people living in poverty. — © *Beth Ryan*

## Health system held hostage, CMA president says

Canada's health care system is the victim of a lack of government planning and an overdose of cost cutting, the CMA president says. "It was clear that a system established over 30 years ago would have to adapt to new realities to continue to provide high quality care," Dr. Victor Dirnfeld said during the Managing Health Care Conference held in Toronto last month. "Unfortunately, when governments finally began to take major

steps to reshape the system their primary concern was to cut the maximum amount with a minimum of negative public reaction." The conference also included addresses by several prominent health economists who discussed various aspects of health reform.

For his part, Dirnfeld said any government-led changes to health care should follow a concrete set of principles to ensure that reforms take a reasoned approach. Currently, "our governments lurch from one crisis to the next, dealing with immediate access problems but unable to repair the damage caused by badly planned system-wide reforms."

He hopes governments will join the CMA lead in developing principles for assessing health care reforms. "It has long been the CMA position that any health care reform must be well planned at the outset, pilot tested before its general introduction, monitored as it is put into practice and evaluated regularly once it is well established," he said.

## Wit and wisdom from the UK

*A Sceptic's Medical Dictionary*, which is published by the *BMJ* Publishing Group and available through the CMA's Department of Publications (800 663-7336 x2307), offers a cornucopia of medical wit and wisdom gathered from hundreds of sources. Consider the way it defines *flexible*, which it says is the only adjective ambitious physicians should apply to their beliefs.

"Yesterday's dogma is particularly dangerous in medicine," it reports. "These days to gain acceptance as a progressive obstetrician you need to campaign for more home confinements, to disparage epidural anesthesia as a grossly overused interference with a natural process, and condemn bottle feeding as a monstrosity almost as grave as infanticide.

"Yet just over 20 years ago a pro-

gressive obstetrician was expected to abuse reactionaries who criticized plans to have all women delivered in 'safer' hospital beds, and had to champion every woman's right to painless childbirth and to free herself from the tyranny of breast-feeding. [It is] the flexible dogma game."

## American ob/gyns reject request from gay colleagues

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) has rejected a request for exhibit space from an organization representing gay physicians, a decision the latter group says highlights why many American lesbians do not receive adequate medical care. In rejecting a request for exhibit space at its annual conference, the ACOG said the presence of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA) "would not benefit or be of interest to the majority of our membership."

"Lesbians often don't obtain gynecological services because they fear encountering homophobia from their gynecologist, and their health suffers because of this," said Dr. Jocelyn White, a GLMA board member. "ACOG's mission is to educate its members about all women's health issues, yet its decision to reject the GLMA shows it is willing to ignore the medical needs of millions of women."

## Occupational health Web site launched

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety has launched a Web site that should interest physicians whose work touches on occupational medicine. The free service ([www.ccohs.ca](http://www.ccohs.ca)) covers more than 100 topics and answers more than 1000 questions concerning chemicals, workplace injuries, ergonomics and more. More information is available by calling 800 263-8466.