

Stand by your man

The Board of Directors at the University of Ottawa Heart Institute voted unanimously in January to reject the resignation of its head, cardiac surgeon Wilbert Keon.

Keon tendered his resignation Dec. 15 after it became known that he had been caught in a prostitution sting in late November and had attended “john school” in exchange for the dropping of all charges. Students attending john school are taught the dangers associated with prostitution.



Keon: humbling experience

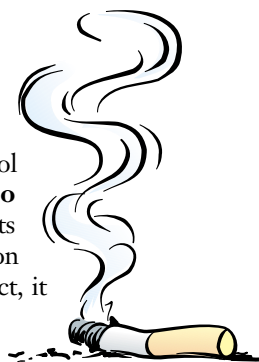
In making the announcement Jan. 14, Chair Gordon Ritchie said “we are not a board of moral censors. Our job is to look at the best interests of the heart institute.” Ritchie and the other board members received a lot of help in making their decision: the institute received more than 14 000 letters and calls from supporters who urged Keon to reconsider his resignation.

Keon was overwhelmed by the support. Although he was pleased to resume his role as director general, he said he will be seeking ways to reduce the pressure and workload that his busy schedule creates; in addition to his work at the institute, he sits in the Canadian Senate. “The fact that I have been given a second chance is truly humbling,” he said. “Although I am returning as director general, I intend to reduce the pressure I have imposed on myself in the past.” — *Steven Wharry, CMAJ*

A smokin' Web site

An estimated 27 million pages of tobacco industry documents are now available through the Web site of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/tobacco/industrydocs/). It provides access to documents released as part of Minnesota's tobacco litigation and settlement with the tobacco industry. In fact, it is the only site containing the complete index of documents housed at the Minnesota Tobacco Document Depository — the largest public cache of tobacco-industry documents in the world. It also includes documents related to the Master Settlement Agreement reached by 46 states and the tobacco industry in November 1998, as well as some 7000 items comprising the Guildford-British American Tobacco documents. It also contains links to industry Web sites operated by tobacco companies, lobby groups and other bodies.

The mammoth site was launched after US President Bill Clinton issued an executive memorandum in July 1998 asking that the “veil of secrecy” surrounding the tobacco industry be lifted. His aim was to increase access to important documents and enhance understanding of the health consequences of smoking.



Advances made, but residents continue to face harassment

Harassment and intimidation in residency education are less likely to be swept under the carpet today, but experts who discussed the issue at a recent conference on residency education have concluded that much remains to be done before the problems are solved.

Dr. Donna Stewart of the University of Toronto told the Fifth Annual Conference on Residency Education that incidents of harassment still “nearly always go unreported because of the fear of negative consequences.” This happens even though there are already numerous position papers and guidelines, and despite the fact that some faculties have policies and others include it in collective agreements. Noting that 75% of women and 20% of men report some type of harassment, she called for a national program that ensures fairness and confidentiality.

Dr. Peggy Ross, associate dean of equity at the University of British Columbia, regularly visits residency programs to explain behaviour that isn't tolerated. “Many people who harass don't know they are intimidating,” she said. She thinks the worst offenders are relatively young physicians “who were harassed or intimidated during their residency and can hardly wait to dish it out. It's unprofessional, but that's the reality.”

Stewart, who has a long-standing interest in the issue (*CMAJ* 1996;154:643-9; 1996;154:1021-5), says there are 2 main groups of perpetrators: young supervisors who don't see any difference between themselves and trainees, and mid- to late-life physicians who may be depressed or abusing substances.

Cathy Lace, legal adviser to the Professional Association of Internes and Residents of Ontario, said harassment and intimidation are not only ethical and accreditation issues, but also raise legal issues. Every province and territory has a human rights statute prohibiting discrimination in employment. Since universities and hospitals are legally bound to have a policy that is enforced vigorously, Lace said the legal liability is a serious issue. “Everybody has an obligation to act against harassment. Otherwise, the institution is vulnerable.” — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*