

# Medical Briefs

*An abridged look at current events in and around the health-care industry*

## Clozaril Reduces Risk of Suicide

The risk of recurrent suicidal behaviour and suicide attempts among people suffering from schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder can be reduced by up to 26% with the antipsychotic medication Clozaril® (clozapine). The finding was recently published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, following a landmark two-year study.

The International Suicide Prevention Trial was the first ever to prospectively demonstrate efficacy of a medication to affect suicidal behaviour in any patient group. Nearly 1,000 individuals participated in the study at more than 60 health centres in the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East. Dr. Herbert Meltzer, lead author of the study report, said that between 30% and 40% of people with schizophrenia will attempt suicide during their lifetime.

The US Food and Drug Administration has approved Clozaril for the treatment of recurrent suicidal behaviour in patients with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder who are at chronic risk. Clozaril is the first medication ever approved for this use.

Study Shows Clozaril Reduces Risk of Suicidal Behaviour Among Patients with Schizophrenia and Schizoaffective Disorder by 26%. Press Release, East Hanover, New Jersey, January 13, 2003.

### This Month:

1. Clozaril Decreases Suicide Risk
2. Canadians in Chronic Pain?
3. Easing Alzheimer's Symptoms
4. Hope for Sun Damaged Skin?
5. New Fellowship for Parkinson's
6. Good News for Eczema Sufferers

## 25% of Canadians Have Chronic Pain

The largest ever Canadian pain survey showed more than 25% of respondents experienced chronic pain, with this number climbing to almost 40% in those over the age of 55 years. Recently published in *Pain Research & Management*, the Chronic Pain in Canada survey interviewed a stratified random sample of 2,012 adults (18 to 75 years) in 2001. A second sample of 340 chronic pain sufferers who were taking prescription medication for their pain was questioned in further detail regarding therapeutic approaches and the social and economic impact of their condition.

Among chronic pain sufferers (those who experienced continuous or intermittent pain lasting for at least six months) who were prescribed treatment, 80% still felt moderate to severe pain. An additional 58% of those patients were unable to carry out their usual daily activities at home. People also reported missing, on average, almost 10 days of work a year because of chronic pain.

Largest Canadian Pain Survey Ever Published Reveals Over One In Four Canadians Suffers From Chronic Pain. Press Release, Montreal, Quebec, January 14, 2003.

## Easing Alzheimer's Symptoms

A sub-analysis of a large Canadian-led study has shown that Aricept™ (donepezil) significantly improved behavioural symptoms such as apathy, agitation and depression, compared to placebo in patients with moderate to severe Alzheimer's disease (AD).

"The behavioural improvement seen with Aricept treatment in these more advanced stages of the disease may assist in the management of the patient and reduce caregiver burden," said Dr. Serge Gauthier, Canadian study investigator and director of the AD research group, McGill Centre of Studies in Aging.

Conducted among 290 patients with moderate to severe AD at 32 sites in Canada, Australia, and France, the double-blind, placebo-controlled parallel-group study randomised patients to receive 5 mg donepezil or placebo daily for 28 days. After this, the dosing could be increased to 10 mg per day as judged by the treating clinician.

Although the Canadian Study of Health and Aging says 54% of Alzheimer's patients have moderate to severe AD, to date there are no approved treatments in Canada for the severe stage of the disease.

Aricept Shows Significant Improvement in Behavioural Symptoms For Patients with Moderate to Severe Alzheimer's Disease. Press Release, Montreal, Quebec, January 22, 2003.

## Soothing Sun Damage

Galderma Canada Inc. recently launched Solagé™, a new prescription-based product used in the treatment of solar lentigines. The medication provides Canadians with a non-invasive, self-applied hyperpigmentation treatment option.

The chemically stable formulation of 2% mequinol and 0.01% tretinoin was found to be safe and effective in improving the appearance of solar lentigines and related hyperpigmented lesions in two double-blind, multi-centre clinical studies.

"The synergistic effect of the mequinol and tretinoin combination in Solagé is a very effective and innovative treatment for solar lentigines," said Dr. Harvey Lui, MD, Professor and Chairman of Dermatology, University of British Columbia and Vancouver General Hospital.

Applied using a precision applicator allowing patients to accurately treat specific lesions, Solagé offers an alternative to more invasive treatments, such as laser surgery or cryosurgery, without the risk of scarring, scabbing, and other permanent side effects.



New Prescription Treatment Addresses Baby Boomers Concerns About Sun Damage. Press Release, Thornhill, Ontario, January 13, 2003.

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## Parkinson Society Fellowship

The Parkinson Society Canada and Boehringer Ingelheim recently awarded a clinical movement disorder fellowship to Dr. Sajeel Chowdhary, who will be training at the McGill Centre for Studies in Aging, in Montreal.

With only 50 Parkinson's disease specialists practicing in Canada, Dr. Chowdhary is a welcomed addition. "Nearly 100,000 Canadians suffer from Parkinson's disease, yet only 45% of these patients see a specialist annually, so appointments such as Dr. Chowdhary's, are critical if we are going to provide patients with the specialised care and treatment they require," said Mary Jardine, national executive director of Parkinson Society Canada.

Parkinson's disease is second only to Alzheimer's disease as the most common neurodegenerative disorder. Parkinson's disease predominantly affects older adults, usually striking between the ages of 50 and 65 years. There is no cure for this progressive disease.

New Fellowship Helps to Address Shortage of Specialists. Press release, Toronto, Ontario, January 23, 2003.

## Eczema Sufferers Dissatisfied

Recent studies said that over 50% of the two million Canadians who suffer from eczema are dissatisfied with their current treatment.

Researchers, however, are hopeful about new treatment options. "Ointment-based formulations help lock-in the skin's moisture. They offer superior hydrating properties compared to creams without the greasy effect they had in the past," said Dr. Richard Langely, MD, assistant professor of dermatology, Dalhousie University and Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax. "For many patients a new breakthrough [Protopic] may bring a new form of relief without the side effects associated with topical corticosteroids."

The Eczema Awareness Support and Education (EASE) program offers patient education with the assistance of leading Canadian dermatologists. For more information on eczema go to the EASE Web site at: [www.eczemaCanada.ca](http://www.eczemaCanada.ca).

More Than Half of All Eczema Sufferers Are Dissatisfied with their Current Treatment. Press Release, Montreal, Quebec, February 3, 2003.

## Fast-Acting Topical Anesthetic Now in Canada

Canderm Pharma Inc. has just released a new topical anesthetic in Canada that takes effect in 20 to 30 minutes. Betacaine<sup>®</sup> has a rapid onset of action, a clear gel delivery and a self-occlusive effect so that no dressings are required.

Until now, topical anesthetics, used primarily to desensitize an area prior to minor surgical procedures, consisted of creamy products that took up to an hour to work. They also required a dressing to occlude the medication from the air.

Betacaine contains the maximum concentration of a topical anesthetic allowed by Health Canada for over-the-counter products, and its anesthetic effects can last from one to two hours. Indicated for the temporary relief of pain and itching associated with minor burns, cuts and scrapes, Betacaine also represents an advance in cosmetic surgery and minor skin removals.

Now sold in local pharmacies across Canada, it does not require a prescription.

Fastest acting topical anesthetic now available in Canada. Press release, Montreal, Quebec, February 5, 2003.

## New Longer Lasting Pain Reliever

Tylenol has just released a new longer lasting dose in Canada. Tylenol 8 Hour is the only long-lasting over-the-counter pain reliever that provides up to eight hours of relief in a single dose. It's an effective, fast-acting way for baby boomers to control the aches and pains associated with aging.

"Aging results in the loss of lean muscle tissue, flexibility, and balance," says Dr. David Greenberg, a general practitioner in Toronto, Ontario. "Activities that were once no problem are now causing minor aches and pains."

More than one third of Canada's population are baby boomers, a generation more active than any other. They are the first generation to participate in exercise or recreational activities as a pursuit or lifestyle choice. Because the body changes as it ages, baby boomers are feeling the wear and tear of these activities. People over 40 can begin to feel the cumulative effects of the activities from their youth. In 2001, body aches accounted for 42% of sales of over-the counter pain relievers.

Indicated for the temporary relief of muscle aches and pain, sprains, headaches, arthritis, and aches and pains due to the flu, Tylenol 8 Hour works up to twice as long as most analgesics.

Living the active life: Canada's baby boomers feel the aches and pains of getting older. Press Release, Toronto, Ontario, January 29, 2003.