

### 1. ARD is more serious than we think

The growing consensus at the Canadian Digestive Diseases Week conference was that the main challenge health-care professionals face when dealing with acid-related disease (ARD) is the attitude of ARD sufferers. Millions of Canadians fail to acknowledge that ARD is a real disease that can lead to serious health issues and requires prescription medication. One study involving 3,000 patients showed that more sufferers (80.9%) were healed using Nexium® (esomeprazole magnesium) compared to those who used another proton pump inhibitor (PPI) (74.5%). “Once you buy into the premise that this is a real disease that affects many Canadians, the effectiveness of treatment options becomes much more relevant,” said Dr. David Armstrong of the division of gastroenterology at McMaster University.

**How does it apply to your practice?** About 8 million Canadian adults suffer from ARD. Many patients and health-care providers believe the myth that ARD can easily be resolved with lifestyle change or over-the-counter remedies. Those assumptions are wrong. Many patients with ARD need effective therapy, such as PPIs. “The irony is that we have effective treatments, they’re just not being used consistently,” adds Dr. Armstrong. “There is a vast amount of research supporting the use of proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) and while they are effective as a class, evolving research is showing differences between them that are clinically important.” The message is that ARD should be taken seriously by patients and health-care providers alike.

*The Heartburn War: Image and Research at Odds. Press Release, Banff, Alberta, March 1, 2004.*

### 2. Children can get faster relief from eczema

New studies show that children aged two to 17 can experience relief from their mild or moderate eczema after only two days of treatment with Elidel® (pimecrolimus) cream, 1%, rather than the usual seven days. The American Academy of Dermatology also reinforces the treatment’s safety and favourable tolerability. Other studies have shown that this steroid-free prescription cream is easier to apply and provides less active drug exposure.

**How does it apply to your practice?** “Itch is a driving factor in the decision to seek treatment for eczema. Fast and effective itch relief is especially important for children who may be less equipped to express and deal with their discomfort than adults,” explained Dr. David Gratton, assistant professor of dermatology at McGill University. Elidel® is useful on all skin surfaces, including the face.

*New Data Show Elidel® Cream Provides Effective Itch Relief Sooner for Children with Eczema. Press Release, Montreal, Quebec, February 20, 2004.*

### 3. Valtrax<sup>®</sup> approved for treatment of genital herpes

Health Canada has approved Valtrax<sup>®</sup> (valacyclovir hydrochloride) for a new indication—to reduce the risk of transmission of genital herpes. A study consisting of 1,484 healthy, heterosexual, monogamous couples showed that Valtrax caplets reduced the risk of transmission of symptomatic genital herpes by 75%. Valtrax should be used in conjunction with safer sex practices.

**How does it apply to your practice?** Over 86 million people worldwide are infected with the herpes simplex virus that causes genital herpes. Twenty per cent of Canadians are infected. Another study showed up to 70% of people contracted the virus from a partner who knew they had genital herpes, but reported no symptoms during recent sexual activity. “The approval of this new indication gives [genital herpes] patients another option, in addition to safer sex practices, to help them protect their partners,” said Dr. Barbara Romanowski, clinical professor in the division of infectious diseases, department of medicine, University of Alberta.

First Antiviral Proven to Reduce the Risk of Transmission of a Sexually Transmitted Disease Approved in Canada. Press Release, Toronto, Ontario, February 17, 2004.

### 4. How do we treat fatigue and lethargy?

Reduced energy and fatigue are two common symptoms in depressed patients that are sometimes overlooked by doctors. Although there is no known biological cause, fatigue and lethargy can be treated. Data links the symptoms to serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine. While there are a growing number of antidepressant medications available, only Wellbutrin SR<sup>®</sup> (bupropion) improves fatigue and lethargy. The drug works in two ways; its norepinephrine induces alertness, focused attention, and vigilance, while the dopamine regulates well-being, motivation, and drive.

**How does it apply to your practice?** About 3 million Canadians suffer from depression; 70% complain of lethargy and fatigue. “It is unfortunate that fatigue and lethargy aren’t as targeted by depression treatment as they should be, because it is this fatigue and lack of energy that often result in the reduction in work and social functioning,” said Dr. Peter Lin, a family physician and medical director of the University of Toronto Health and Wellness Centre. However, Wellbutrin SR’s dual mode of action makes it the ideal antidepressant for patients who need increased energy, cognition, and motivation.

Depression: Are Physicians Neglecting to Treat Fatigue and Lethargy? Press Release, Toronto, Ontario, January 22, 2004.