

mendable, but we must improve the present publicly funded system. This requires an assessment of many options, including nongovernment funding of health care services.

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## HAZARDS OF CAMPHORATED OIL

Having read the report on the dangers of ingested camphorated oil ("Camphorated oil: still endangering the lives of Canadian children," *Can Med Assoc J* 1995; 152: 1821-1824), by Drs. Jochen G.W. Theis and Gideon Koren, I wish to point out the dangers of misreading the label and the consequences of ingesting an ounce of camphorated oil.

During the late 1970s I was an associate in a group practice in rural Nova Scotia. For some reason a high school student of 17 or 18 years of age was required to undergo a barium enema. In those days preparation for the procedure involved the patient taking an ounce of castor oil the day before the examination. The student's mother happened to mention to her neighbour that she was going to the village pharmacy to buy some castor oil. The neighbour said that she had a bottle of "castor oil" in the house. The boy was given an ounce of camphorated oil, which was clearly marked as such on the label. He suffered severe tonic-clonic seizures and was admitted to a tertiary care hospital in Halifax, where he remained critically ill for about 2 weeks. The sad thing about this case was that the young man's seizures were so violent that he dislocated both shoulders. This was not diagnosed until some time later. Before the incident, the student was a star hockey player; he has not been able to play hockey since.

Many people do not distinguish between similar words and are probably only aware of the first two or three letters when reading a word. In this case there were two hazards: poor reading ability and a highly toxic substance of doubtful efficacy that is readily available over the counter.

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## HEARING LOSS AMONG CHILDREN WHO HAVE UNDERGONE ECMO

In a recent article, my colleagues and I reported the outcomes after 2 years among infants who had undergone neonatal extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) at the Western Canadian Regional ECMO Centre ("Neurodevelopmental outcome after neonatal extracorporeal membrane oxygenation," *Can Med Assoc J* 1995; 152: 1981-1988). We have continued to assess the outcomes among these children and have become concerned about the high incidence of delayed-onset high-frequency neurosensory hearing loss.

We now recommend that these children undergo frequent and complete audiologic testing by a certified audiologist who is familiar with the evaluation of hearing in children. Parents are instructed to monitor their children's responses to sound. This testing should continue until bilateral threshold responses to sound can be accurately tested, usually after 3 years of age. Because hearing loss affects the development of speech and language as well as early learning, prompt identification of hearing impairment is extremely important.

We do not have an explanation for the increased incidence of neurosensory hearing loss among these

children, nor do we know why onset of this impairment is delayed in some children.

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## IT'S A HORSE'S LIFE

Concerning the criticism of the pregnant mare's urine (PMU) industry by the animal rights lobby (*Can Med Assoc J* 1995; 152: 1745-1748), one must realize that, like dogs, horses owe their existence to their usefulness to humans, whether as food, beast of burden, companion or source of pleasure.

The number of horses on farms in England and Wales in 1922 was 1 340 495. By 1952 that number had fallen to 316 099. The number of horses employed in agriculture dropped from 805 000 to 46 000 over the same period.<sup>1</sup>

Modern show horses lead a completely artificial life. They spend most of their time in stables, to avoid injury and for ease of husbandry and because horses tend to destroy pasture. They are transported by road and air, and they are exposed to crowds and noise. They usually become accustomed to these, but on first exposure they often experience agitation or terror.

Work horses, where they are still used, tend to be stabled throughout the winter and to be worked long hours in heat and flies in the summer. When I remonstrated with my father as he recounted the 14-hour summer days his horses worked before mechanization, he remarked that it was harder for the men, who had to be up before dawn to feed them and then had to groom and feed them at the end of the day.

Most thoroughbred race horses