

## New materials on air pollution and health for physicians

**T**he BC Lung Association, with support from the BC Ministry of Environment, has developed information on air pollution and health for BC physicians. The materials are available at the BC Lung Association web site ([www.bc.lung.ca/air\\_quality\\_primer.html](http://www.bc.lung.ca/air_quality_primer.html)). The *Primer for BC Physicians and Resource for Informing Patients* was developed in response to a survey of more than 150 BC physicians that indicated the need for more information on the impacts of air pollution on health. The primer gives information on the health effects of air pollution, common air pollutants and how they are monitored, the air quality health index, and ways to lower exposure to air pollutants. Also available at the site is an appendix, *A Guide to Air Quality Information for the Public*. This six-page document provides basic information on air pollution to the public and provides an extensive list of other web sites and resources on air pollution and health topics with an emphasis on BC.

The UBC School of Environmental Health has developed, with funding from Health Canada ([www.soeh.ubc.ca/Continuing\\_Education/](http://www.soeh.ubc.ca/Continuing_Education/)), an online course for physicians, which is called Outdoor Air Quality and Health and the Air Quality Health Index. The course has been approved for CME credit by the College of Family Physicians of Canada (3 Mainpro-M1 credits) and by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons.

It was developed in consultation with leading air pollution and health experts with backgrounds in research, medicine, and public health. The course provides a comprehensive overview of air pollutants, the health effects of air pollution, and how to advise patients about the effects of air

pollution on their health. It includes a section on the new air quality health index and how it differs from the air quality index.

### **The course provides a comprehensive overview of air pollutants, the health effects of air pollution, and how to advise patients about the effects of air pollution on their health.**

The web-based course has multimedia content and text with hyperlinks to online resources and additional references. A discussion forum is available for interaction between learners and subject matter experts. The goal of the course is to provide physicians and other health professionals with:

- An understanding of the basics of air pollution including common air pollutants and their sources.
- An understanding of the health effects associated with air pollution, susceptible populations, and mechanisms by which air pollutants exert their effects.

- A framework for advising patients on reducing adverse impacts of outdoor air pollution on their health.
- Information on using the air quality health index in advising patients.

Expected time to complete the course is 3 to 4 hours plus time in the discussion forum. The course is available from 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2011. There is no charge, but you must register. For further information contact Ms Lydia Ma at UBC ([Lydia.ma@ubc.ca](mailto:Lydia.ma@ubc.ca) or 604 822-9599).

### **Heat and mortality**

The really hot days of the year are now well behind us. However, this summer did see some new records being set for daily high temperatures. There has been much interest in the research looking at the effects of temperature on daily mortality. Although “epidemics” of heat-related deaths like the ones that occurred in France and Chicago have stimulated widespread interest, as has been the case with air pollution and health, analysis of large data sets has made it possible to detect relationships at levels that were previously thought to be without effect. The implication of this is that heat-related mortality is likely more common and important than previously believed. Dr Tom Kosatsky of the BC Centre for Disease Control has analyzed some of the temperature and mortality data from the Lower Mainland last summer with some interesting findings. Look for the results of this research in an upcoming edition of the *BCMJ*.

—Ray Copes, MD

—Bill Mackie, MD

**Environmental Health Committee**