

News

We welcome news items of less than 300 words; we may edit them for clarity and length. News items should be emailed to journal@doctorsofbc.ca and must include your mailing address, telephone number, and email address. All writers should disclose any competing interests.

Diversity Working Group members selected

At its meeting held 10–11 September 2020, the Doctors of BC Board of Directors approved appointments to the new Diversity Working Group created to provide input into implementation of recommendations from the *Doctors of BC Diversity and Inclusion Barrier Assessment* report and develop a high-level diversity vision statement for Doctors of BC.

Members of the working group are:

- Dr Derek Chang
- Dr Simone Cowan
- Dr Ahmer Karimuddin
- Mr Jatinder Khatra (medical student)
- Dr Caroline Lohrisch
- Dr Rola Masri
- Dr Olutoyese Oyelese
- Dr Kellie Whitehill

Creation of this working group was one of the key recommendations of the *Barrier Assessment* report. For more information, please visit www.doctorsofbc.ca/advocacy-and-policy/advocacy/hot-topics/diversity-and-inclusion.

Pandemic report from BC Family Doctors

A report from BC Family Doctors, *Reimagining Family Medicine: Learning from the COVID-19 Experience*, tells the story of the impact the pandemic has had on family doctors' professional and personal lives—how COVID-19 shone a light on the cracks of a fragile primary care system. As well, it demonstrates how family physicians and the health system can be nimble when faced with a crisis.

BC Family Doctors brought together a group of family physician leaders to explore the potential to accelerate some of the positive changes that have emerged during the pandemic and shine a spotlight on the existing

challenges aggravated by it. The report offers a comprehensive approach to supporting physicians' needs both as health care providers and human beings. Read the report at <https://bcfamilydocs.ca/pandemic-report>.

BC Family Doctors advocates for family physicians across BC, working to ensure the fundamental role of family doctors is seen, heard, and valued.

New contract options for BC physicians

Following a year of consultations between Doctors of BC and the Ministry of Health, the ministry is now offering BC doctors a number of new contract options for interested physicians to help provide greater freedom of choice in the way they practise. The new contract options address a number of key points of interest raised by doctors, including the desire of some established and new-to-practice family doctors to move away from the fee-for-service (FFS) model toward an alternative compensation model, and the needs of doctors whose FFS practices have been significantly destabilized due to conditions resulting from COVID-19.

The contract options are:

- Group contract for practising family physicians.
- Individual contracts for new-to-practice family physicians.
- Simplified temporary COVID-19 service contracts through to 31 December 2021.

Group contracts will also continue to be offered to anesthesiologists and ER physicians.

These new contracts are part of a suite of available compensation options that may be attractive to doctors, depending on their personal circumstances.

The ministry consulted with Doctors of BC during the development of the contracts. For

detailed information visit www.doctorsofbc.ca/managing-your-practice/compensation/contract-offerings (member login required). If you have questions after reading the material provided online, contact Doctors of BC staff at negotiations@doctorsofbc.ca.

Online training for women's support workers to recognize brain injury in survivors of intimate partner violence

A free e-learning course from UBC researchers provides education for staff at women's shelters to recognize signs and symptoms of brain injury in survivors of intimate partner violence. According to the World Health Organization, one in three women will experience intimate partner violence; most will also suffer a brain injury. COVID-19, and the fact many women were forced to self-isolate with their abuser, has only heightened the need for the training.

To tackle this issue and explore the intersection of brain injury in intimate partner violence, Paul van Donkelaar, professor of health and exercise sciences at UBC Okanagan and the principal researcher on the project, together with Karen Mason, former executive director of the Kelowna Women's Shelter, formed the Supporting Survivors of Abuse and Brain Injury through Research (SOAR) initiative, based at UBC Okanagan. Through a collaboration with Shelina Babul, clinical associate professor in the Department of Pediatrics at UBC, SOAR launched a novel version of the Concussion Awareness Training Tool (CATT)—an online training system developed to standardize concussion recognition, diagnosis, treatment, and management.

CATT for Women's Support Workers is a 45-minute video-based interactive course that features a series of online educational

modules and resources, including the voice of a real survivor of violence. The course is available nationwide in English and French. View the course at <https://cattonline.com/womens-support-workers>.

The project is funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada and the Max Bell Foundation. For more information about SOAR, visit www.soarproject.ca or follow @CanadaSoar on Twitter or @SoarProjectCanada on Facebook.

Inhaled drug cocktail could block COVID-19, temporarily

Immunotherapy based on antibody research being developed by Vancouver Coastal Health Research Institute researcher Dr Horacio Bach could provide short-term protection against the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. Dr Horacio Bach and his team hope a temporary antibody-based treatment will help the immune system clear the COVID-19 virus from the body without inducing inflammation or a cytokine storm. Dr Bach, study co-lead Dr Ted Steiner, and their team are developing single-chain antibodies that would neutralize proteins the COVID-19 virus employs to infiltrate cells. Though there are millions of potential antibodies to choose from, Bach and his team have already identified over 20 hopefuls since beginning their research in April.

The researchers are using a novel approach involving a bacterial system to screen the antibodies. An antibody attached to a noninfectious virus is injected into a bacterium, and after a processing step, researchers check whether that blocks viral proteins used by COVID-19 to infiltrate host cells. Several protective antibodies against COVID-19 are being sought, as the virus possesses a multitude of protein keys to unlock the body's cells. The ideal therapy would contain an antibody cocktail that can guard against multiple lines of viral attack.

The therapy may be delivered via an inhaler for short-term security from the virus, with the goal being for a dose to shield against the virus for several hours or more until protective antibodies are processed and expelled from the body—long enough to catch a flight, go to an appointment, or see a loved one.

The novel coronavirus infects mostly primary airway epithelial cells. Once these cells

CIHR childbearing and pregnancy survey

The Research Examining the Stories of Pregnancy and Childbearing in Canada Today (RESPCCT) study invites people across Canada to share their stories of pregnancy and childbearing by participating in an online survey. Information gathered will improve understanding of how people experience health care during pregnancy and childbirth throughout Canada, and will be used to improve care for all types of communities. A diverse group of people who had recent pregnancy experiences created or chose the survey questions, working with researchers and numerous community-based organizations. For more information or to take the survey, visit <https://respct.ca>.



are infected, white blood cell antibodies (macrophages) attack the virus-containing cells and internalize them. Problematically, COVID-19 also infects macrophages with its protein key, which can lead to a heightened and potentially deadly cytokine storm. Bach's therapy could sidestep this problem by encapsulating COVID-19 with antibodies that would not infect macrophages, giving the body a leg up on slowing and stopping the disease.

Dr Bach is an adjunct professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases at the University of British Columbia and manager of the Immunity and Infection Research Centre Proteomic and Antibody Engineering Facility. He anticipates that this approach will enter human trials by spring 2021.

Infant immunity, gut health, may be compromised with fish oil supplementation during breastfeeding

According to researcher Deanna Gibson, an associate professor of biology in the Irving K. Barber Faculty of Science, UBC Okanagan, taking fish oil supplements while nursing may not be beneficial and may even negatively impact babies' immunity. A study published in the *ISME Journal* is the first to investigate the

impacts of fish oil supplementation on the composition of breast milk and infant gut bacteria.

Researchers demonstrated that supplementation corresponded with an increase in breast milk fats but a decrease in the immune-protective components of the milk, and observed a change in infant gut microbiology—away from the bacteria normally present.

For the study, senior author Gibson and the research team evaluated 91 women and their babies; half took daily doses of fish oil while the other half did not supplement. Breast milk samples, infant stools, and immune function markers were compared between the two groups.

Women who took supplements had a higher ratio of omega-3 fatty acids but lower protective molecules, such as antibodies, in their breast milk. The supplemented infants had a lower diversity of bacteria in their stools, considered a negative. Researchers warn that this is a change that could result in infection risk for the infant. With these findings in mind, Gibson cautions that the practice of prenatal fish oil supplementation may induce long-term dysfunctional gut immunity. Further large-scale studies will clarify whether early fish oil exposures alter infectious disease susceptibility, including persistent asymptomatic chronic infections.

For more information about this study, visit <https://rdcu.be/b37ri>.