



Import

A WEEKLY REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS IN HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

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Welcome to this edition of Import. In it you will find summaries of new and interesting issues and developments in health and human services, as well as "In My Humble Opinion," a short analytical article by an Agora Group affiliate. Please feel free to visit The Agora Group's web site, which can be accessed by pressing the "our affiliates" button on the Consultant Network web site: consultant-network.ca.

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ARTICLE ON GOVERNMENT RELATIONS NOW ON AGORA WEB SITE

On May 3, John Butler of the Agora Group gave a speech at the 6th Canadian Health Charities Roundtable, sponsored by the Health Charities Council of Canada. The text of the speech, entitled *Government Relations: Who's From Mars and Who's From Venus?* is now available on line at http://www.consultant-network.ca/agora/articles/gov_rel.pdf.

Readers wanting to access a complete list of on-line speeches and articles from The Agora Group can go to <http://www.consultant-network.ca>, then click on *News and Views*, then on *Interesting Articles*

ONTARIO CMHA SLAMS GOVERNMENTS ON MENTAL HEALTH

On May 5, the first day of Mental Health Week, the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Ontario Division, issued a media release sharply critical of how governments – particularly the Ontario government – have "failed the mentally ill". According to the release:



"The promise of increased income support for some people with mental illness is a step forward. However, last week's Throne Speech was yet another missed opportunity to ensure that Ontarians with mental illness and their families will have access to essential services when and where they need them, as community-based services continue to be eroded while the demand for these services increases.... The mentally ill have been seriously short-changed in the past 15 years by a lack of funding and commitment to ensuring that necessary services were in place before closing or reducing institutional services. In that time, ten reports dealing with the issue of mental health care reform have been released.... Despite this protracted planning process and the myriad of recommendations that call for an investment in community mental health care, this sector remains neglected and has reached a crisis point.... At least half of the five-year \$250 million mental health commitment made in last month's Budget proposal and repeated in the Throne Speech last week will go directly to continuing the province's program to divest the provincial psychiatric hospitals and only a miniscule amount will go to front-line services. Ironically, divesting hospitals will put even more pressure on community agencies whose chief mandate is to provide the life-saving services designed to ensure the mentally ill can cope and survive in the community, outside of hospitals and other institutions. The mentally ill in Ontario are literally being consulted to death."

The release is at <http://www.newswire.ca/releases/May2003/05/c7887.html>.

ONTARIO CMHA LAUNCHES "MENTAL HEALTH WORKS" WEB SITE

On May 6, CMHA Ontario Division launched Mental Health Works, a web site to provide employers and employees with new tools to help them deal with mental illness in the workplace. The web site is found at http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/content/information_and_links/mental_health_works.asp.

MONTREAL OPENS SUICIDE RESEARCH CENTRE

Montreal's Douglas Hospital has officially opened the McGill Group for Suicide Studies (MGSS), a research facility to study the biological, behavioural, clinical and social risk factors for suicide. The MGSS owns one of the world's largest collection of DNA samples from individuals who have committed suicide, as well as a brain bank dedicated solely to research on suicide.

The MGSS comprises 5 independent investigators and over 20 research associates, including a histopathologist, clinical psychologists, psychiatric nurses, laboratory technicians and clinical interviewers. In addition, 14 graduate students are being trained at MGSS.

NEW BRUNSWICK FUNDS FARM SAFETY SUMMER CAMP

New Brunswick's government has provided funding to the Agriculture Producer Association of New Brunswick to operate a five day farm safety summer camp in July for young farmers, between the ages 14 and 16 years. The object of the program is to embed farm safety concepts in young people at the very beginning of their farming careers. Other partners in the summer camp are the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.



FARM WASTE REEKS HAVOC?

On May 2, New Brunswick announced the formation of a new not-for-profit company called the National Agricultural Greenhouse Gas Management Institute (NAGMI) that will look at ways to address greenhouse gas emission in agricultural operations. It will provide the vehicle for testing and validating greenhouse gas measurement and management.

The project was initiated in response to the Kyoto Protocol and aims at helping Canada meet its greenhouse gas emission reduction goals. Based in Fredericton-Junction, the Institute will be managed by NAGMI's greenhouse gas management contractor, CANUS-Agra Ventures Inc. Canadian farm organizations have been asked to join the NAGMI as founding members, and so far the Dairy Farmers of Canada and the Canadian Pork Council have agreed to do so. By 2007 NAGMI will employ about 30 full-time graduate and post-graduate scientists and business professionals with extensive experience in field environmental applications.

However, a recent article in the *New York Times* reports that air-related problems from factory farming go beyond greenhouse gases. The article cites mounting (but not yet conclusive) evidence of illness developed by those living near large factory hog farms in the US – illness that may be traceable to the large amount of hydrogen sulfide and other toxic gases given off by waste storage ponds on the farms. The article also claims US Department of Agriculture officials have tried to protect the factory farms by squelching research and publicity about the volume and effects of airborne pollutants from these farms, which are much more like industrial plants than like traditional small scale family farms. And according to a May 6 *Environmental News Service* article, Bush administration officials are negotiating with lobbyists for the large farms to establish voluntary monitoring of air pollution, which will shield farm operators against penalties for Clean Air Act violations. Said John Walke, director of the Natural Resources Defense Council's (NRDC) Clean Air Program, *"This backroom deal smells every bit as bad as the stench from these animal factories. It is yet another example of the Bush administration trying to dismantle our bedrock environmental laws at the expense of public health."*

The *Times* article is at <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/11/health/11HOGS.html?th>.

As well, Worldwatch Institute has released a report claiming that a timeworn technique for dealing with high-pollution industries – moving them to developing countries with poor environmental laws and a desperate need for employment – is taking place with factory farming. The report *Factory Farming in the Developing World* focuses on the Philippines, an emerging centre of large-scale livestock production and processing. In that country, annual production of poultry has increased five-fold since 1980. According to the report, this industrialization of livestock production nearly wiped out the stock of native Filipino chickens and forced most family farmers out of business or into adopting factory farming methods themselves. Says the study's author, Danielle Nierenberg, *"Factory farming methods are creating a web of food safety, animal welfare, and environmental problems around the world, as large agribusinesses attempt to escape tighter environmental restrictions in the European Union and the U.S. by moving their animal production operations to less developed countries."*

A media release on the report is at <http://www.worldwatch.org/press/news/2003/04/17>.



BC CREATES LIFETIME SURVIVOR BENEFITS FOR DECEASED WORKERS' PARTNERS

On May 5, British Columbia announced it will change the Skills Development and Labour Statutes Amendment Act to provide monthly benefits for life to all surviving partners of workers who have died as a result of workplace accidents, including partners without children. The benefits are based on a portion of the monthly benefit the deceased worker would have received for a permanent total disability, with the percentage increasing according to the survivor's age. The changes will also increase the age at which benefits paid for dependent children end, to 19 years old from 18 for children not attending school, and to 25 from 21 for children in school. The revised act will also allow surviving dependants to retain 50% of their Canada Pension Plan survivor benefits instead of losing 100%, and clarify that a surviving partner keeps their own Canada Pension Plan retirement benefit rather than having it deducted from their WCB benefit.

BC CREATES LOANS FOR SPOUSAL ABUSE VICTIMS

On May 3 British Columbia's Minister of State for Women's Equality announced the province will make loans available to women who are the victims of spousal abuse. The loans of up to \$25,000 are meant to help women leaving transition houses to purchase shares in co-op housing. Women escaping abusive relationships often lack the financial resources to purchase homes and may not be eligible for conventional loans.

The loan program will be operated by the Co-operative Housing Federation of BC, an association representing more than 260 housing co-ops. The association will aim to expand the fund through private-sector contributions. Women will receive loans for the initial share purchase to become a co-op member, which typically costs a minimum of \$500. Loan repayment options will consider the situation of women leaving transition houses. For example, women may require a grace period to re-establish themselves financially before repaying the loan. A media release on the initiative is at http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/nrm_news_releases/2003MCAWS0057-000427.htm.

BC also announced on May 1 that it is changing its policy towards laying charges in cases of alleged spousal abuse. Until now, Crown counsel have been required to lay charges on all reported cases of domestic violence, but 40% of cases never go to court because of lack of evidence or reluctance of the victim to testify. Under the new rules, Crown counsel have the option of asking the court to impose a peace bond or restraining order, or to impose alternative measures such as counselling when counsel believe there is low risk of future violence.

Although the new approach runs the risk of downplaying abuse as a criminal offense, BC says it allows greater protection in the 40% of cases in which criminal charges would not produce a conviction and would afford no protection to victims.

NEWFOUNDLAND PROCLAIMS NEW ADOPTION ACT

On May 1 the government of Newfoundland and Labrador proclaimed its new Adoption of Children Act. The new Act allows for openness agreements, meaning that birth parents and adoptive parents may agree to an ongoing exchange of information or contact. The Act also provides for greater openness in the release of adoption information. Those individuals adopted under the new Act, upon reaching 19 years of age, will be able to apply to Vital Statistics for a copy of their original birth registration and a copy of their



adoption order. In addition, birth parents of adopted people who are 19 years of age or older may apply to Vital Statistics for a copy of the adopted person's birth registration and adoption order to learn the person's adoptive name.

For adoptions finalized under the former Act, individuals are able to file a disclosure veto to prevent identifying information from being released through the birth registration or adoption order. A media release on the new Act is at <http://www.gov.nf.ca/releases/2003/health/0501n05.htm>.

NOVA SCOTIA BOOSTS PALLIATIVE CARE EDUCATION

In April, Cancer Care Nova Scotia and the province's district health authorities launched the Palliative Care Front-line Education Program. Local community-based educators deliver the three-day, interactive education program designed to help communities keep the education going on their own and to ensure that people are well trained for palliative care. Topics include: principles of palliative care; pain and symptom management; communication; spiritual care; grief and bereavement; self care and closure.

More than 800 health professionals in Nova Scotia will participate in the program this year in six of the province's nine health districts. The remaining three districts participated in similar training during a Rural Palliative Home Care Project in 1999.

A media release on the program is at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/news/details.asp?id=20030506001>.

YUKON TO HOST PRIMARY HEALTH CARE FORUM

On May 26 and 27, Yukon will host a forum for one hundred Yukon health professionals, First Nations representatives and community members to discuss and select primary care priorities on which the territory's Department of Health and Social Services will focus. Departmental staff and a representative of the Council of Yukon First Nations organized the forum, which will also include 15 people selected at random from those Yukoners who expressed interest in participating. Participants will receive a workbook to help them focus their ideas and concerns at the two days of meetings. The workbook will also be available to people unable to attend the forum in person.

Said Jan Horton, one of the forum's organizers, *"We know what some of the concerns are; they are mental health issues, alcohol and drug abuse issues, management of chronic disease and needs of community nurses. We know the concerns, now we need to talk about acting to respond to those needs."*

A media release on the forum is at <http://www.gov.yk.ca/news/2003/may/03-087.pdf>.

MANITOBA TO CREATE IMMIGRATION COUNCIL

On May 1 Manitoba introduced legislation to establish a council to advise the province on its immigration strategy. The Manitoba Immigration Council Act allows for the appointment of a 12-member commission with representation from business, labour and multicultural organizations that would help the province in its goal of increasing its annual level of immigration to 10,000 people, and keeping them in Manitoba. Council members would be appointed by the cabinet and would serve for three-year terms. Said Labour and Immigration Minister Becky Barrett, *"Immigration policy is increasingly becoming a partnership involving all*



levels of government. This council will help the province establish the proper supports so immigrants can build new lives and help make this province a more dynamic place."

A media release in the legislation is at <http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/press/top/2003/05/2003-05-01-08.html>.

SARS DECLINES IN CANADA: PRECAUTIONS AND PLANS CONTINUE

The SARS outbreak in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) shows signs of abating, but research, planning and precautions continue. On May 6 Health Canada announced the membership of a National Advisory Group on SARS and Public Health. The ten-member group (as well as three ex officio members) will assess the lessons learned from the current public health situation in relation to SARS and explore long-term approaches to prepare Canada to respond to future infectious disease challenges. It will be chaired by Dr. David Naylor, Dean of Medicine at the University of Toronto, and its members include Frank Lussing, President and CEO of York Central Hospital in Richmond Hill; and Dr. Sheela Basrur, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health. The group will complete its report within 3 months.

On May 7 an infrared fever sensing system (IFSS) scanner on loan to Canada from the government of Singapore went into operation at Toronto's Pearson Airport. Twelve of these thermal scanners (6 for Toronto and 6 for Vancouver) will arrive in Canada by May 19 and will be operational a few days after their arrival.

As well, Ontario's health minister Tony Clement has said a range of hospital activities and procedures will be reviewed as a result of Toronto's experience with SARS, including the use of casual staff who work in several health facilities. Clement faced criticism when he expressed surprise at the number of staff who had to work as casuals in several facilities to make ends meet. Nursing organizations said they had repeatedly drawn Clement's attention to the shortage of full-time nursing positions in hospitals and other health facilities.

The May 6 edition of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* published the article *Clinical Features and Short-term Outcomes of 144 Patients With SARS in the Greater Toronto Area* which compared the Toronto and Chinese experiences with SARS. Noteworthy was the "startling" high rate of SARS infections of health care workers (51% of Toronto's cases were health care workers). The article is at <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/289.21.JOC30885v1>. As well, an article in the May 3 edition of the UK medical journal *Lancet* examined the Hong Kong SARS outbreak, and noted a high mortality rate among the elderly (43.3% in patients 60 years of age and older, compared to 6.8% in those younger than 60).

As well, laboratory results released on May 4 suggest the SARS virus may be able to survive for hours or days at room temperature on surfaces such as doorknobs and tables, increasing the chance that infections can take place in ways other than direct contact with an infected person. One study found that the virus remained viable for up to four days in human waste, a finding that could clarify how SARS can spread through apartment buildings, hospitals and other facilities. German scientists found a common detergent failed to kill the virus, indicating that some efforts to sterilize contaminated areas may be ineffective. A Japanese experiment found that the virus could live for extended periods in the cold, suggesting it could survive the winter.



Also in *Lancet*, the results of a genome study by a research team in Singapore were published. The study compared the complete genomes of SARS virus from cases in Canada, China, Hong Kong and Vietnam, and showed that the SARS virus has not mutated appreciably, holding out greater hope for development of a vaccine. On the other hand, the lack of significant mutation suggests SARS will not mutate into a milder form.

Much attention still focuses on China, where the possibility of a spread of the epidemic to ill-equipped rural areas poses the possibility of a massive breakout of the disease.

ONTARIO SUPPORTS WEST NILE VIRUS STUDY

On May 2 the government of Ontario announced it is working with McMaster University on a study to determine the extent of community exposure to West Nile virus (WNV) in an area of Halton Region where the virus was known to be prevalent last summer. The study is gathering information on how many people in southern Oakville were infected by WNV last summer but did not exhibit serious symptoms of the illness. The 1,500 people involved in the study have already been surveyed about their attitudes and behaviours toward WNV last year, and a blood sample will be taken to determine if there is the presence of the WNV antibody. Blood sample collections will be completed in early May and results of the tests will be completed by mid-June and made available to the people who participated in the study.

On May 8 Ontario's Health Minister Tony Clement announced that all West Nile virus testing can now take place in Ontario, with a quick turnaround of three days. Up to 400 tests per day can be done, through the addition of 26 provincial laboratory staff, and two staff will also be sent to Health Canada's National Microbiological Laboratory in Winnipeg for training on the new tests being done in Ontario. Last year, tests were done only at the National Lab, and involved delays in reporting results of up to two weeks.

UK: PUTTING TEETH INTO MERCURY POLLUTION

The UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has launched a consultation on mercury emissions from crematoria after issuing a consultation report claiming that crematoria are a leading source of air-borne mercury emissions. The emissions result from the breakdown of mercury amalgams in fillings found in the teeth of those who are cremated. According to the report, by 2020 crematoria will emit between 11% and 31% of UK mercury emissions into the air – in part because emissions from other sources are declining, and in part because the age cohort likely to be cremated over the next 20 years comprises people who were prone to extensive restorative dental work involving mercury amalgams. The report says the mass of mercury emitted is more important than the species of mercury emitted, since all species of mercury emitted from crematoria can be converted into methyl mercury, the most toxic form. This conversion occurs in marine environments, and methyl mercury can then accumulate in the food chain.

The report describes a process for removing mercury from crematorium gases that is, according to the report, affordable for the UK's crematoria.

The consultation report is found as a 25 page PDF file at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/crematoria/consultation.pdf>.



UK GOVERNMENT: DON'T SMACK THE KIDS

The UK government has announced new regulations that prohibit child care workers from hitting children under their care, even if the caregivers have written parental permission to use physical means of correcting children's behaviour. The National Childminding Association, which has 45,000 members, says it is delighted at the news but Families First, an organization that campaigns for the protection of parents' rights, said the rules undermine the role of parents.

Child care workers in Wales were banned from hitting children last year under regulations approved by the Welsh Assembly. In Scotland, child care workers can smack children with parental consent as long as the punishment falls within the concept of "reasonable chastisement".

US-BOUND DRUGS FROM CANADA TO BE GUARANTEED

Health Canada officials have officially given notice that all pharmaceuticals exported from Canada to the US will meet strict quality guidelines. The announcement comes after the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) repeatedly stated its opposition to Canadian sales of pharmaceuticals to US residents – often seniors – who face higher drug prices in the US than in Canada. The drugs are often sold through mail orders, but busloads of US seniors also visit Canadian border communities to buy pharmaceuticals.

The US Congress has twice passed bills that would make it legal for people in the United States to re-import US-made drugs from Canada, but the US Department of Health and Human Services raised concerns that the medicines' safety could not be guaranteed, and the bills were never enacted. In addition, the FDA recently has begun to more strictly enforce regulations for web sites that advertise low-cost drugs from Canada. FDA Commissioner Mark McClellan said drugs from Canada account for about 1% to 2% of U.S. drug purchases, and some pharmaceutical industry officials estimate the sales are increasing by 50% per year. McClellan called Health Canada's statement a potentially useful step but added, *"We still can't assure safety and quality because the products go outside of our authority. The situation remains 'Buyer beware,' and that's not a good way to assure public health"*

US: ADDICTIONS ADVOCACY GROUP ISSUES ALCOHOL COST CALCULATOR FOR BUSINESSES

The US advocacy group Ensuring Solutions has launched the Alcohol Cost Calculator (<http://www.alcoholcostcalculator.org>), a web-based tool to help businesses calculate company losses resulting directly from alcohol problems among their employees.

The initiative, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, is part of a comprehensive effort to demonstrate to businesses how they can improve access to treatment, curb health care costs, and increase productivity. Ensuring Solutions analyzed data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Household Survey on Drug Abuse to generate the paradigms of the tool.

To use the Calculator, a business enters its business category and number of employees. A customized report, available instantly, details the findings. For example, a financial services industry company employing 500 people may have 27 problem drinkers in its workforce and 64 family members who are



problem drinkers. Resulting from the problem drinking, the company would then lose 550 work days per year due to sickness, injury and absence, 134 work days of lower productivity, and US \$132,881 in alcohol-related health care costs. Ensuring Solutions also provides snapshots of untreated alcohol disease in ten industrial sectors.

OUR NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOUR IS EVERYONE: MOTHER VALERIA

Valeria Makeyeva is 74 years old and the tenant of a one room apartment in Moscow. She writes poetry. She was twice imprisoned in Moscow's infamous Lubyanka Prison for her religious beliefs. The first time, she was 13 years old. The second time, she spent 4 years in prison. Between her two terms in prison, she entered the Mikhailovsky Women's Monastery in Odessa, and she became a Russian Orthodox nun at age 15.

She is known as Mother Valeria, and her single room is a refuge for a number of Moscow's homeless people – people with alcohol problems, people with serious illnesses, orphaned children, Chechen refugees, people who often do not have official documents – the “internal passports” they need before they can access official services. To make room for the people she shelters, Mother Valeria sleeps on the floor of her apartment. One night last year, there were 27 people in the apartment. She begs during the day to get the resources she needs to help the homeless, although the International Fund for Christian Education now regularly supplies Mother Valeria's shelter with food and medicine.

She has been harassed by fellow tenants in the apartment building, and by officials, for operating her shelter. Several years ago she appealed to the church for help against the harassment. The church in turn sought help from a member of the Russian Duma (parliament). He made her case public and argued that under the Russian Constitution she had every right to operate her little place of refuge, and most official harassment stopped.

In 1996, Mother Valeria was “rehabilitated” and declared a victim of political repression. She keeps her rehabilitation documents in a pouch around her neck and proudly shows them to visitors.

In 1982, after her second release from prison, she was given the one room apartment. Metropolitan Pimen of the Russian Orthodox Church, who would later become Valeria's patriarch, greeted her upon her release, saying, *“You have a roof over your head. Never forget those who don't.”*

Mother Valeria has never forgotten.

MORE NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOURS: JEREMY'S ANGELS

Carol Sutton is a South African businesswoman in northern KwaZulu-Natal who deals in traditional African art. Several years ago her son Jeremy was robbed and murdered while buying crafts from local women in the remote Ubombo district.

Two years ago, Sutton decided to do something to help reduce crime and to help the victims of crime. Since then she has put together a network of 40 women in KwaZulu-Natal (many of whom are victims of crime) who make beaded “angels against crime”. The women earn a subsistence income from making the angels. Sutton sells the figurines, and the proceeds are used to campaign against crime and to support victims of crime. So far she has sold 20,000 angels.



Says Thembigele Mdletshe, a victim of crime who makes angels for Sutton, *"I wish all people could be like these innocent angels. More and more of our children are becoming orphans because of crime."*

To see the result of the women's work, go to <http://www.angelsagainstcrime.co.za>. As the web site puts it:

"May Jeremy's angel have wings strong enough to take a message of hope to all who have suffered. May it have wings strong enough to stop this madness!"

REMEMBER AFGHANISTAN?

The tidal wave of news about the US invasion and occupation of Iraq has obscured the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, the West's flagship attempt at nation building. Recent press reports, however, point to the increasing strength of warlords, attacks on aid workers and Coalition forces, a resurgence of repression of women, and the spectre of a revival of the Taliban.

In a May 7 open briefing to the UN Security Council, Lakhdar Brahimi, the head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), described the *"deterioration in the security environment, which stems from daily harassment and intimidation, inter-ethnic and inter-factional strife, increases in the activity of elements linked to the Taliban and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and the drugs economy."*

Mr. Brahimi said that rivalries between factions and local commanders, impunity for human rights violations, and the daily harassment of ordinary Afghan citizens by both commanders and local security forces were common. *"There are also now almost daily attacks by elements hostile to the central government and those who support it,"* he added. He noted that the attacks had of late been directed at international humanitarian organizations, and as these become more threatening, the pressure to suspend or withdraw operations increases. Brahimi appealed to the Security Council to consider authorizing an expansion of the International Security Assistance Force beyond the Kabul region. The Council has declined repeated requests by UN and Afghan officials to expand the authorization of the international force, which numbers about 5,000. That force will come under the command of NATO in August, but there has been no signal of any expansion.

In light of the deteriorating situation, on May 10 the UN suspended its humanitarian operations in southern Afghan provinces. The UN has suspended mine clearance on parts of one of Afghanistan's most important routes for commerce and relief aid, following attacks on de-mining teams on the road between Kabul and the southern city of Kandahar. It has also imposed precautionary travel restrictions on UN personnel, including a curfew on nighttime road travel anywhere in the country.

As well the country's opium poppy eradication program has ground to a halt in the face of opposition from local officials and farmers demanding compensation for the destruction of their crops – compensation not likely to come soon from the cash-strapped Afghan government or from international sources.

After all, Afghanistan and its miseries are now "old news".

OUR READERS SAY....

In the last edition of *Import*, we reported on the possible health hazards of depleted uranium shells used by American forces in the Gulf War and in the recent invasion of Iraq. A reader with a military background



corrected an inaccuracy in how we described depleted uranium shells. His description of what the shells do is horrific, and in sending it to us, he pointed out that *“If one thinks and feels about what one is describing, one really has to think about alternatives to ending lives to end disputes.”* His description warrants inclusion in its entirety, as a condemnation of modern technological war:

“Uranium doesn’t harden the shell. It IS the core or tip of the round. It is used because it is free and very effective. It is almost twice as dense as lead, and hard. When it hits a target (say a tank), the ‘pencil’ of uranium punches a hole right through the armour. On its way through it creates so much heat that it turns the uranium and the tank armour into plasma – atoms stripped of their electrons – that spews inside the tank. The contents are flash cooked.

Used in great quantities in the 1991 Gulf War, it was used as the core of the round in the Avenger Cannon in the A-10 attack aircraft. It was so effective that one round would finish the tank and crew yet the outside of the tank looked perfect. The satellite guys fought with the A-10 crews about ‘kills’ until the satellites noticed that the tanks were cold the day after the attack. All by a hole less than an inch in diameter. The Avenger round is about a foot long and less than 2 inches in diameter (from my memory) and the uranium is inside the middle of the ‘bullet’ part. In this case it is really a sabot round – the outer casing of some other material (looks lead-like) is just there for aerodynamics/accuracy. When the front of the round hits the side of the tank, the uranium pencil just keeps on going into the tank. There is no benefit shooting people with it – it goes right through them and hits stuff you weren’t aiming at. It is good for armour though, because of the plasma effect.”

IN MY HUMBLE OPINION: DRAGONFLIES AND TURTLES

Let me share with you two images, two times.

The first of these was a long cholesterol-laced breakfast stretched into early afternoon, in a loggers’ restaurant beside a paper mill on the outskirts of Timmins. I was there with Dennis Bernardi, who had for many years worked for the Addiction Research Foundation in Timmins. Dennis and I had exchanged desultory e-mail notes over the past few years, but we had never found the time to compare notes about who we were and what we were doing.

Dennis was writing a book, and he had reached that crucial stage in which the ideas were in place, but the connectedness of the ideas was yet to come. We talked about his book in the middle of a hundred other things we talked about – Dennis, with his knowledge of aboriginal and eastern philosophies among other things, tends to turn a conversation into a voyage.

The second image, back in Markham, the same week. As part of a consulting project I was doing, I had tracked down a busy executive to arrange an interview. She returned my call from her cell phone while stuck in the glue-like no-flow of the Don Valley Parkway, halfway between one Very Important Persons’ meeting and another VIP meeting at the other end of the megalopolis. Her voice dripped with the irate and unhappy impatience of someone doing too many things for too many people with too little success.

It occurred to me that it was for her and for her kin that Dennis was writing his book.



It is now more than a year later, and Dennis has sent me a copy of his book, entitled *Dragonflies & Turtles: A Guide to Living in the Hurricane's Eye*. Even though Dennis is my friend, I think I can distance myself enough to say it is a remarkable book, filled with a cast of characters as diverse as Bugs Bunny, Mother Theresa, Casey Stengel, Zen Master Shunryu Suzuki and Yosemite Sam, all within just over one hundred pages of humour-leavened text.

At its core, the book is about simplifying one's life without turning simplification into a narcissistic separation from those around us. It is about finding what is important – even the trivially important. It is soaked in images of water, as a paradigm for the fluidity of the world in which we live, and for our own way of melding ourselves with that world.

Dennis comes to his observations from personal experience with a sense of drowning. His own apocalyptic version of the woman in the car on the glutted highway is his alarm-bell experience hyperventilating on an over-organized work-related road trip on one of the north's lonely highways. But he also brings to bear his years of experience in the addictions field: he frankly addresses the need for "withdrawal management" as one moves toward a more simplified life.

Dennis posits the problem most of us face:

"Each of us participates in a kind of hallucination that assures us of tranquility and a place in the sun if we simply figure out society's rules and follow them. I suggest that there's some exaggeration in the notion of wisdom that embraces us when we strive to follow the tribe's rules without reservation. My permanent itch insists it's a room filled with smoke and mirrors.

The fast pace of life is only part of it. We float in a sea of permanent noise that promises fulfillment around the next corner but rarely delivers what we need. Like the kid who goes to the carnival seeking the sensual delight promised by the carnival barker, we often enter the tent and get rolled. Being increasingly needy, we save our money and come back for more stimulation and pain."

In response to this, Dennis has written a book about *"pausing once in a while to update ourselves on what we want from life and what life wants from us."* It is neither a how-to book, nor a jeremiad (although Dennis describes simplification techniques that have worked in his own life). It is one man's experience, passed on to others.

Like most good books, *Dragonflies & Turtles* is a navigational device that helps the reader to think down pathways not mapped out by the book itself. It occurred to me, for instance, that many of the book's observations are fitting lessons for public service organizations that, like people, can become obsessed with the please-everyone, chains-instead-of-anchors world in which they operate.

Dragonflies & Turtles also crossed my mind last week as I listened to another Dennis – Dennis Raphael, of York University – make the keynote presentation on social determinants of health at the annual gathering of the Health Charities Council of Canada. Dennis Raphael shows all the signs of a man who enjoys what he does, despite the opposition he faces in pointing out that poverty and social exclusion kill more people than bacilli and toxins do. And it occurred to me too that our unegalitarian society even robs the poor of their capacity to pursue the simplicity Dennis Bernardi talks about. Few lives are as busy and complex –



and lethal – as the lives of those “welfare bums” who must scabble to pay the rent, feed the kids, avoid the muggers and kowtow to the powers-that-be, all for the sake of a life whose greatest success is survival.

Thank you, Dennis Bernardi, for writing an incisive, witty and wise book. And thank you, Dennis Raphael, for talking about what many do not want to hear.

Dennis Bernardi’s *Book Dragonflies & Turtles: A Guide to Living in the Hurricane’s Eye*, published by Trafford Publishing, is finding its way into bookstores, but it can be ordered directly from Trafford for Can\$19.95 through <http://www.trafford.com/robots/03-0247.html>.

John Butler, The Agora Group

FROM THE QUOTES VAULT

“On the one hand, each of us is a unique person, with our own characteristics and gifts to share. On the other hand, we are all full and equal members of universal intelligence. Call it whatever you want – God, Tao, Creator or Brahman. We do not have to earn it. It just is.”

Dennis Bernardi, *Dragonflies & Turtles: A Guide to Living in the Hurricane’s Eye*, 2003