

eFACTS

— January 4, 2001

HAPPY NEW YEAR! eFACTS, a summary of current newsworthy *facts* and *effects* is made available to people who have a continuing interest in mental health reform in Alberta. We thought you should know!

1. This year, 77 nations across the world will participate in a global celebration of volunteers. The United Nations' acclaimed International Year of Volunteers (IYO) will recognize and honour the enormous contribution that volunteers make to the social and economic fabric of our society. Volunteers are the life blood of the CMHA. For more information about volunteerism and how you can celebrate 2001, contact Volunteer Canada at www.iyccanada.org or phone 1-800-670-0401.
2. Researchers in Ontario and Florida may have found a vaccine against Alzheimer's disease. The vaccine has been shown to protect the memories of mice, and human trials are now under way. The product could be available in about two years. In the meantime, eat fish. University of Guelph researchers say that fish (salmon, trout and tuna) contain high levels of docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) which appears to prevent the onset and alleviate the symptoms of Alzheimer's. Organic brain disorders affect about 1% of Albertans and the number appears to be increasing. More than 200,000 people in Canada now have Alzheimer's disease and the Alzheimer's Society predicts that without a remedy that number could increase to 750,000 within thirty years.
3. The Alberta Mental Health Board has announced the appointment of a Provincial Suicide Prevention Co-ordinator. Ms. Chris LaForge has degrees in Occupational Therapy and Administration and more than 11 years' experience in the mental health field. Her appointment may herald a new government commitment to suicide prevention. More than 400 Albertans kill themselves every year, for an estimated economic cost of \$244 million. The Alberta Government now spends about \$1 million per year on suicide prevention.

4. On average about 290 Canadian youth between ages 10 and 24 commit suicide each year. It is now the second leading cause of death for this age group. In a recent publication entitled "Youth Suicide and You," CMHA's Suicide Information and Education Centre (SIEC) details the problem and what can be done about it. Contact SIEC at www.siec.ca or phone (403) 245-3900.
5. An Alberta Brain Injury Forum involving 135 stakeholders, including CMHA, met in Red Deer in mid-December and developed a comprehensive action plan for brain injury services in Alberta. The plan, which focuses on community-based care and parallels CMHA's "Framework for Support," will now be finalized and submitted to the Health and Wellness Minister in January. This is a very promising development.
6. Alberta Health and Wellness has given \$9.5 million over five years, in new money to the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. The Foundation now receives \$4.6 million a year, and while their resources include the former Mental Health Division Research Fund, and while they remain vitally interested in mental health research, the AHFMR receives few proposals. For more information, including guidelines, the Foundation can be reached at www.ahfmr.ab.ca
7. The Continuity of Mental Health Services Study (COMHS), which will monitor the effect of care continuity over an 18-month period, will begin Phase II this month. About 700 clients in the Calgary, Red Deer and Edmonton Regions will be asked to participate in the study. CMHA has supported the study with advice and referrals. If you, your family members or clients wish to participate in the study, more information is available on their web site at www.amhb.ab.ca Or by phoning 1-403-297-4882.
8. The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities has just released its draft report, "Alberta's Disability Strategy." The report is the culmination of more than a year of consultation with stakeholders (including CMHA). The report fits well with the CMHA vision and "framework" philosophy, focusing on full citizenship, personal supports, income, learning and employment. The Council would like final feedback on their report prior to January 15. For more information, contact the CMHA Division or the Council at pcspd@planet.eon.net or phone 1-800-272-8841.

9. The Alberta Medical Association, while negotiating for better fees, has circulated to its members some disconcerting information regarding physician supply. They note that between 1990 and 1997, for every physician who came to Canada, 18.8 physicians moved to the USA. They predict a shortage of more than 1,000 Alberta doctors by year 2005. The meaningful figure, though, is the number of physicians per 100,000 population. It was 167 last year versus 171 in 1993. The per capita ratio of psychiatrists has also dropped, although the number of individual psychiatrists has increased from 231 in 1993 to 254 in 1999. The loss of both family physicians and psychiatrists is critical to the mental health system, as family physicians provide much of the primary care for mental health problems and access to specialists is now difficult. Taken in total, billings for treatment of mental disorders is the most prevalent diagnostic classification, with charges to the Alberta Health Insurance Plan in excess of \$79 million in 1998/1999. Physicians on average earn \$150,000 with psychiatrists earning about \$175,000, before expenses.
10. We reported on an Alberta company, "Synergy Group," in our November 2 edition. An Alberta Report magazine article on December 18 has generated a flood of interest in that company's product and we thought we should repeat the November information here. The product, named "E-Power," is a nutritional supplement containing vitamins, minerals and amino acids, said to be effective with bipolar depression and other disorders. The monthly cost is about \$200.00. The anecdotal information and testimonials are very encouraging and the initial research on the supplement by the University of Calgary has been positive — however, their sample was very small. More research is now being done by the U of C with \$554,000 from the Alberta Innovation Fund. While CMHA has not historically endorsed or promoted specific products, we do provide information and referral. Synergycan be reached at www.truehope.com or at 1-888-TRUEHOP.
11. A 1999 Columbia and Indiana University study found that in a 1996 survey, 12.1% of Americans perceived people with mental illnesses to be "violent, dangerous and frightening." This contrasts with a related 1950 survey which found only 7.2% of Americans shared that view. Ironically, the increase in negative public attitudes is occurring at a time when other research says that mentally ill people are not prone to violence and at a time when the public appears to have a deeper understanding of the causes of mental illness and that treatment can be effective. The researchers hypothesize that the link between

mental illness and violence may be the result of television and movies.

12. Job Opportunities. CMHA Alberta Division requires an Executive Director for its provincial Suicide Prevention programs based in Calgary. Contact Ron LaJeunesse at (780) 482-6576 for more information. The CMHA's Alberta North Central Region requires a Day Program Co-ordinator and a Day Program Assistant. Contact the Day Program Supervisor at (780) 414-6300 for more information.
13. The detail for the 26th Congress of the World Federation for Mental Health Congress to be held in Vancouver on July 22 to 27 is now available. Contact the CMHA Alberta Division or go to www.venuewest.com/wamh2001

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