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## ***Children and youth new to Canada*** *Canadian Paediatric Society's health care guide*

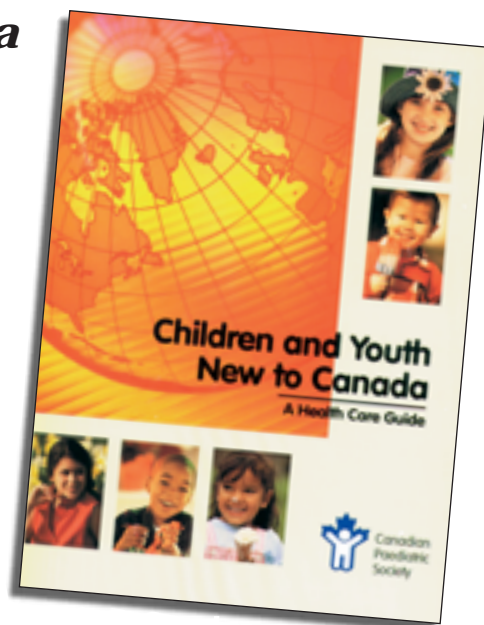
Dona Bowers, MD, CCFP, FCFP

**H**ave you ever grappled with where to begin with a new family, recent escapees from a country ravaged by a civil war? What immunizations do they need? What are the endemic diseases in their country; what screening should you do? How do you assess for psychosocial trauma? How do you use a cultural interpreter? What should be done on an initial visit and subsequent follow-up visits?

Finally, a guide for primary health care providers is available: *Children and Youth New to Canada: A Health Care Guide*, prepared by the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) and endorsed by the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

Canada hosts 200 000 immigrants annually. Some have planned their immigration for years; others have abruptly escaped as refugees from war-torn countries. Recent waves of immigrants hail from eastern Europe, the former USSR, Africa, Central America, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Their health care systems, health practices, and health status bear little resemblance to those in Canada (which they understandably find confusing).

At least 25% of these immigrants are children. To optimize their health, these children require health care providers who appreciate the connection between culture and health. In developing *Children and Youth New to Canada: A Health Care Guide*, the CPS involved more than 50 experts representing pediatrics, infectious diseases, family medicine, multicultural health, community



and immigration services, health policy and promotion, psychiatry, and public health.

The guide contains immigration statistics, health care coverage eligibility, initial medical interview and follow up, international adoption issues, immunizations, various aspects of health care, psychosocial assessment, management of selected infectious diseases, health issues by regions, health promotion information for parents, and so forth.

The content is informative and user-friendly. The format uses ample maps, charts, and tables interspersed with written text. The generous smattering of vignettes, cautions, and tips vividly illustrate the issues addressed in the text. In particular, the index facilitates ready access to the information assembled.

## Resources ❖ Ressources

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### Health education in a new environment

The chapter on health promotion for parents lists such topics as fever, diarrhea, safety, immunizations, rash, healthy eating, and positive parenting. While these materials have been developed explicitly for new Canadian families, the information is written in plain English (or French) and permission is granted to photocopy or translate. These single-page fact sheets are an excellent handout for *any* parent. They provide basic information to assist in caring for infants, children, and teenagers. Not only does the handout on healthy eating include Canada's Food Guide, it also comments on junk food, babies in bed with bottles, hand washing before food preparation, and washing dishes. Some topics are particularly timely for newcomers (eg, frostbite).

Although the concept of a family physician who provides primary care by appointment seems obvious to us, it is a novel concept to many immigrants. They could be more accustomed to queuing up at a clinic only after herbal remedies have failed during an acute illness. Preventive care is often unknown. Not only do we practitioners share the duty of optimizing immigrants' health, but also of enhancing their access to our sometimes confusing maze of health care.

Helpful hints for practitioners are included. For example, the immigration process requires a chest x-ray examination, urinalysis, and syphilis serology, but does not require checking immunizations. *Children and Youth New to Canada* includes tables of recommended immunization schedules for children not immunized in infancy as well as comparative schedules from other countries. Clear recommendations are made for assessing need for immunization when documentation is lacking.

### Nonjudgmental information

Unless practising in a multicultural neighbourhood, most primary providers will not be familiar with female genital mutilation. The sexual health section provides a factual description of the procedure, outlines the reasons cited for the practice, and enumerates possible complications. The description is informative and nonjudgmental. It also provides cautions for male physicians examining the breasts or genitalia: permission should be obtained.

The chapter on international adoption issues addresses general adoption issues; preadoption counseling; and information to be gleaned about the child, birth parents, and agencies involved. A helpful checklist is included for potential adoptive parents taking a trip abroad to meet with potential adoptees.

One disappointing aspect of the guide was the very brief resource list. Contacts included multicultural health organizations, public health departments, or ministries of health in each province and territory. These are not particularly helpful to busy practitioners.

This guide is long overdue in assisting primary providers in providing nonjudgmental, informed care to newcomers to Canada. Whether a practice is located in a multiethnic neighborhood or in a more homogeneous area with only occasional newcomers, this guide is packed with useful information in a well-organized format. Its design is perfect for busy clinicians requiring quick information on specific immigration health issues. ❖

**Dr Bowers** is a Physician Manager at Somerset West Community Health Centre in Ottawa, Ont, located in an inner-city, multiethnic neighbourhood.

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