

Residents' page

Out with the old, in with the new!

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As I bid adieu to the Residents' Page, I do so with regret; it has been a truly enjoyable experience to write, but even more, to read and hear my colleagues' views in and about this space in *Canadian Family Physician*.

You might have noticed that we missed a few months this year; unfortunately, budgets have been slim in the last 12 months. While *Canadian Family Physician* regrets being unable to fit a Residents' Page into every issue, the tradition does live on (but occasionally skips a month). My successor, Dr John Campbell of Memorial University, will be taking over this post starting with the July 2003 issue. Dr Campbell, brave soul, will assume the role of Section of Residents Chair at the same time! You will also hear more from Dr Campbell than you did from previous Residents' Page editors. For "continuity of care," this editorial post is being gradually extended to 2 years. As always, *Canadian Family Physician* staff and Editorial Advisory Board members encourage you to fill future pages with reflections on any and every aspect of family medicine life and training.

Taking advantage of this space for the last time, I want to add a short comment on our world today. As you might know, journal articles are written some time in advance of publication. I am writing these words in the final days of March, and though someone in Montreal missed the memo announcing the winter's end and permitted the unpardonable act of dumping fresh snow on the ground, I struggle to retain the fresh optimism that blew into town with a mild spring breeze last week.

It is not just the weather that strains my optimistic view. Armed combat rages in Iraq and a war of a different kind goes on

against a mysterious virus in Asia, Europe, and North America. I do not presume to comment on whether the war is "just" though it seems to me, as physician and human being, that any loss of life is difficult to justify.

We are also reminded of our vulnerability to a different enemy—one viewed only with the aid of a powerful microscope, but lethal all the same. The severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak has threatened the medical community by claiming the health and lives of health care workers all around the world. Suddenly, the image of the selfless physician treating lethal diseases in past centuries is reawakened. Doctors and nurses showing signs and symptoms of infection still cared for their patients initially with a sense of altruism that, while admirable, placed their contacts at risk.

Perhaps this mysterious illness will serve as a wake-up call to all those (myself included) who feel jaded in the relative safety net of universal precautions. We will become more vigilant; we will be more prepared should another pandemic rear its ugly head. The worst-case scenario has already happened for the families who lost loved ones to SARS. I implore all who care for patients to remember the tenet taught in life support and first aid courses: when rushing to help a victim, put your altruism on momentary hold, reevaluate the situation, and take precautions so that you do not add to the number of people requiring rescue! ❀

Dr Malkin is looking forward to starting her third year of residency in family medicine and emergency medicine at McGill University in Montreal, Que, and is a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of *Canadian Family Physician*.

Residents are encouraged to e-mail questions, comments, personal articles, and helpful information to residentpage@cfpc.ca.