
Preface to the 2009 CSEB* Student Conference abstracts on chronic disease

Careers in epidemiology

John Last, MB, MD, DPH

One of the pleasures of life in my old age is to be reinfected with youthful enthusiasm by contact with young people. It doesn't matter much whether that contact is direct (face-to-face) or indirect, via the medium of the written (or these days the electronic) word. Face-to-face interaction seems manifestly preferable until I reflect on it at leisure and realize that when it's written down, it can be recalled to my computer screen whenever I want. This has equal though different advantages. I was privileged to enjoy both at the time of the graduate student conference preceding this year's CSEB Conference in Ottawa.

The papers presented by the graduate students cover a wide range of subjects; many are of very high quality, promising a bright future for epidemiological research and practice. I had the pleasure of addressing them all on the subject of their choice, careers in epidemiology, and of interacting with many during the reception that evening and during the CSEB Conference that followed.

There is some dissonance between the proportional share of career directions suggested by the current preoccupations of Canadian graduate students and my perception of the domains of maximum future concern in epidemiology. In my own presentation to the CSEB Conference I tried to cover almost the whole broad territory of epidemiology; but I did suggest that an imminent need exists for many more epidemiologists to get involved in environmental epidemiology, and particularly in research and surveillance of the impacts of global climate change on human health. I was a little disappointed that only one paper at the student conference directly addressed health impacts of climate on health,

although many more dealt with other topics in environmental epidemiology. Much more work, some of it quite urgent, is needed on, for instance, surveillance criteria, risk assessment, and evaluation of intervention strategies, in relation to the imminent health threats attributable to climate change.

The future challenges in research and surveillance of the health impacts of climate change are numerous and daunting. But they are increasingly urgent. I hope the full energy and intellectual capacity of a large proportion of the generation of epidemiologists represented at the student conference in Ottawa this year will be concentrated on this important domain.

The 2009 CSEB Student Conference abstracts on chronic disease can be found in the online edition of Chronic Diseases in Canada at: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/cdic-mcc/30-1/cseb_01-eng.php

* Canadian Society for Epidemiology and Biostatistics