

Spring 2000

From the President's Corner

This past year has been one of significant activity and growing pains. The most central I will address later. First, though, some money matters.

CAPE, as you will read in the News Briefs column, is skirting the brink of financial disaster. We're spending more money than we are earning, and our reserves are running out.

To counterbalance that reality, we are delighted to announce that through the good offices of CAPE member Joe Rea of London, Ontario, CAPE has received a generous grant of \$35,000 from the Arcangelo Rea Family Foundation. This sum, however, is earmarked for use in the area of children's health and the environment, so it will only marginally contribute to paying CAPE's ongoing operating expenses. We're still very close to the wire.

On the plus side, however, our membership is steadily growing, and now numbers nearly 80 members from coast to coast. The vast majority of our members have joined through word of mouth or personal contacts, still the most valuable and cost-effective means of outreach. We need to grow to about 200 members before we can consider ourselves able to maintain even our current bare-bones operation. So if you have a colleague who you believe is interested in environmental and health concerns, please approach him or her and ask them to join CAPE.

Ecotoxicity and Life Expectancy

By Dr Trevor Hancock

An extract from 'Future Directions in Population Health' published in the Canadian Public Health Journal, Vol. 90, Supp. 1, pp. S68-70:

...One of the stock responses of the chemical industry, when concerns are raised that the widespread chemical contamination that we experience today is affecting health, is to point out that life expectancy continues to increase - so where's the problem? This response, however, displays a remarkable ignorance - willful or otherwise - of the meaning of life expectancy. There seems to be a widespread belief that life expectancy is somehow predictive, whereas it is anything but that. It is in reality a somewhat sophisticated and complex way of measuring average age of death. Life expectancy tells us absolutely nothing about how much longer we may live, it simply tells us that if everyone born today had the same average life experience as all those dying this year, they could expect on average to live as long as those who are dying this year. So in reality life expectancy tells us a lot about those who die but tells us nothing about the living. And of course the basic premise is false, because we will not experience the same life circumstances as those who are dying, on average in their mid-70s, today.

One of the ways in which we differ is that, since approximately the 1950s, people have been born with a body burden of persistent organic pollutants such as DDT and PCBs, and have continued to be exposed throughout their lives to a multitude of toxic chemicals at very low levels - called "ecotoxicity" (5). Ecotoxicity, of course, is not confined to humans but affects other species in the web of life, and thus threatens overall ecosystem health. Thus we are approximately 40 years into a major experiment to find out what happens when an entire cohort is exposed to such ecotoxicity throughout its life. While we do know that the average age of death for those born before 1930 is still increasing, we have absolutely no way of knowing what will be the average age of death of those born in the

1950s, 1960s or subsequently. Moreover, we won't know the answer to that for another 30 to 50 years. So we will just have to wait and see whether ecotoxicity shortens life.

CAPE Rejected by Revenue Canada

In October, CAPE was turned down in our application for charitable status (the right to give tax receipts to donors for income tax purposes). We were told, in a letter from the Charities Division, that we failed to qualify because:

"We are of the opinion that your activities, as a whole, reveal an organization whose principal interest is to influence government policy through direct representation, cooperative efforts alongside similar organizations and raising public awareness. Further, we believe many of these activities would be deemed political activities, activities which registered charities are prohibited from engaging in."

We had been warned that this might happen. But since we had gone over our application carefully, with legal assistance, we thought it might fly. It didn't.

However, we learned something important from this exercise. We found out, from unofficial but well-informed sources within Revenue Canada, that the Federal government has mounted a quiet, implacable campaign against environmental NGOs. The reason? The Freedom of Information/Protection of Privacy Act has made the embarrassing back-room deals, sweet-heart arrangements with the corporate sector, and absurd bureaucratic directives much more accessible to public scrutiny, and hence more liable to cause political embarrassment. So the government has acted to penalize groups like CAPE, denying us charitable status to make our fund-raising activities that much harder. Their hope is: "no money, no influence."

We discovered that no environmental group has received charitable status in the last four years! Ironically, of course, every environmental group that received charitable status before then does everything — and more — that CAPE was doing and hoped to do. Friends of the Earth, Pollution Probe, the Canadian Environmental Law Association, the David Suzuki Foundation — all exert political pressure on the government to deal with environmental issues. And CAPE has worked with all of them!

So despite rhetoric in the last Throne Speech about the environment, about inviting public dialogue and wanting to work with public interest groups, the Federal government is quietly working to resist change and maintain the status quo.

At our last AGM, the CAPE Board decided on a strategy to deal with this situation. After further legal consultation, we will form a separate, purely educational entity, and apply for charitable status for it. Board member David Rosen has agreed to coordinate this process, and he has been working since the AGM to form a Board of Directors for the new group, tentatively called the 'Global Health Education Fund.' This new organization will be directly linked with CAPE, but unlike its 'parent,' will simply produce educational material for health professionals and the public.

The 'good' news out of this is that CAPE can now speak out freely on environmental health issues, without fear of offending some politician and losing charitable status. We can be more forthright and explicit in addressing inadequate government responses to environmental issues.

But it also means that we will be relying primarily on our rank and file membership to support our program of activities. So please: approach interested friends and colleagues who want to join a strong, well-informed and innovative professional organization that speaks out clearly and insistently about the environmental concerns of health professionals and of society as a whole.

Make this organization your organization.

EcoFriends

(This feature section contains a brief synopsis of a group that shares CAPE's basic perspective.)

CPAR • Canadian Physicians for Aid & Relief

CPAR/Plant a Tree Africa (PAT) is an international development organization dedicated to supporting vulnerable, low-income people in their efforts to achieve better health. Established in 1984, CPAR has grown to include programs in Malawi, Uganda and Ethiopia. Its mission is to work for a healthier planet, where health is broadly defined as the physical, mental, economic and environmental wellbeing of individuals and the communities they live in.

CPAR stays involved with communities for a number of years to overcome the roots of poverty. Last year the Plant a Tree in Africa program planted 3 million tree seedlings with a survival rate of 85%.

President and CEO: David Zakus
Tel: 1-800-263-2727

Citizen Environmental Action in Stratford, Ontario

One of the newest and most enthusiastic members of CAPE is Ontario family physician Sergio Lappano. He's joined the Board of Directors and already made his mark with his energy and enthusiasm. Here's a short report he sent us concerning work he's involved with in his home town of Stratford, Ontario.

Stratford is a very beautiful community which draws thousands of tourists each year to the Stratford Festival Theatre. It is also blessed with a picturesque setting amidst a collection of beautiful gardens and parkland. Unfortunately Stratford continues to use herbicides in its parks and recreation areas. Granted, the frequency of spraying has recently been reduced to one application over only about 40% of the city grounds on a rotational basis. There is often a second application to the perimeters and fences.

While the city feels this is a safe compromise, several concerned citizens came together and formed a group called 'Groundswell.' In November, 1999, we made a presentation to the city Parks and Recreation Subcommittee. We requested a total ban on the use of herbicides and

pesticides in the city parks and recreation areas. I was one of the presenters and focussed my remarks on health concerns.

Following our presentation the Municipal subcommittee asked the Manager of Parks to return to the Subcommittee with his report on this matter, taking into account our concerns. His report was due before Christmas and Council's Subcommittee was to meet in January to reconsider the matter. So far the report is not available and the meeting has been postponed to a future date. Of interest is the fact that the tenders for park maintenance are now due.

In the interim our committee has contacted several other municipalities for direction, and we have also either met with or informed other municipal groups about the matter. I have made one presentation to the minor sports soccer association, and another presentation to the city's Beautification and Environment committee.

The committee of concerned citizens is made up of people with very diverse backgrounds. The creation of this group occurred quite spontaneously, but has been very cohesive and productive. Our biggest event so far was a conference on March 4 in Stratford featuring a four course GMO-free meal, a keynote address by the Hon. Senator Eugene Whelan, and presentations by: CAPE member Tom Barnard; farmer Marie Carter, Coordinator of the Catholic Rural Life Conference in London; Eleanor Kane, Co-director of Stratford Chefs School and Co-owner of The Old Prune Restaurant; Peter Kevan, Department of Environmental Biology, University of Guelph; David Pullen of McCully's Hill Farm; and Neal Stoskopf, Geneticist, University of Guelph. There are also plans to hold a Dandelion Festival some time in April, and another group of individuals is preparing a leaflet to inform home owners about alternatives to lawn spray.

Our objective is to organize the city in small areas, and challenge each area to become a chemical-free zone.

CAPE News Briefs

Finances

At our AGM in November, Roger Coady, CAPE's accountant, highlighted that total revenue for the year ended June 30/99 was reported as \$5,233.00, while total expenditures were \$9,940. The current year deficit of \$4,707 is offset by the opening surplus balance of \$10,145; therefore the accumulated surplus balance stands at approximately \$5,400. The essential message is that CAPE's finances are an ongoing concern and this will be an important topic at our next board meeting. Meantime, all donations will be greatly appreciated. Please make cheques payable to PGS clearly marked "for CAPE." Thanks.

Canadian Guide to Health and the Environment

Finally, the book that former Chair Tee Guidotti and former Board member Pierre Gosselin edited has been published by the University of Alberta Press. CAPE has been offered a 40% rebate on all sales as a fund-raiser. Anyone interested in obtaining a copy, or selling copies, of this practical and comprehensive new book on environmentally sound daily living can contact Andrea Levy at the head office.

Fundraising

1,800 pieces were mailed to physicians from the Canadian College of Family Physicians in July 1999. Despite the bad timing (we had no choice), we received a 1% return, probably acceptable given the circumstances. No concrete plans for another direct mail campaign have been set, but the general feeling was that next time non-physicians should also be targeted.

Communications

Cape has two list serves -- Capework for board members and administrative work, and Capenews for general environmental information. We encourage all members with internet access to subscribe to the Capenews listserv. Just email a message to our office manager, Andrea, at <pgsadmin@web.net> or to Warren at <cppbell@web.ca> asking to join, and we'll do the rest. It's as simple as that, and you will be able to keep up on what CAPE is doing. And don't worry: Capenews is not crammed with messages! You'll get about 4-8 messages per week.

Projects

Education Project

Nicole has prepared a presentation on Environmental Contaminants and Children's Health. She is also planning on collating an educational package for circulation to MDOs for local community presentations on pesticides, which will include slides and written material. We will explore funding for replication and distribution.

HPB Project

The 'Transition' legislative review is scheduled to begin in the new year, February or March. Kapil Khatter, CAPE's link with this process, has been asked to prepare a paper by the HPB on the newly created office of Public Involvement in the Health Protection Branch. The HPB Transition process represents one of the few opportunities left to address environmental/health issues, in light of the gutting of the CEPA last summer. The Risk Management Working Group of the HPB transition process will be releasing their new framework document shortly. Kapil has a leaked draft copy.

We hope to widely notify other interested groups and consult with them on a joint strategy in monitoring the HPB Transition process.

PMAC/PMRA

Kelly Martin presented very successfully to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development on Dec. 2 — her tightly knit, well-referenced and emphatic presentation on the special vulnerability of children to adverse effects of pesticides was well-received. The final version is being posted on the CAPE website (www.cape.ca). Kelly continues on the Pesticide Management Advisory Council, with Kapil as her backup.

Global Warming

Trevor has participated in initial activities of the Federal Office of Climate Change. We have been approached by the Suzuki Foundation to participate with them in their campaign warning of the effects of this trend and asking the Federal government to do something about it. Also, Alan Abelsohn made a presentation at the Ontario College meeting in November/99 on this subject.

Greening Health Care

This project is currently on hold as Bill Rees, a professor, previously interested in doing a hospital eco-footprint, dropped out for personal reasons. Any CAPE member who knows a friendly hospital administrator who might allow his or her hospital to be analyzed, please contact Andrea in Ottawa.

Jetskis

The Canadian Family Physician has published CAPE's rebuttal to Bombardier's absurd comments on our original editorial in the same journal. Unfortunately our letter was reduced from 1500 to 400 words, so most of the details on Bombardier's manipulation of the data were omitted. However, other groups have already expressed an interest in using our work to bolster theirs. There is a growing trend for jetski use to be cut back, one watercourse at a time. If you're interested in local action on jetskis, contact Andrea at CAPE's head office.

GMOs

At our AGM, the subject of genetically modified foods was brought up, and it was felt that CAPE must get into this area. Since then, Dr. Tom Barnard, a committed activist in this area, has taken on the role of CAPE's liaison with other groups in this area, and CAPE has joined a new alliance, based in Toronto, that is becoming increasingly outspoken on this critical subject.

Organic Food

Warren is currently working on several projects with the Vancouver-based food policy NGO, Farm Folk/City Folk. These include analyzing key areas in the food system, such as pesticides, GMOs, breastfeeding, organic farming and other issues. In addition, he has made contact with Wendy Holm, a B.C. agronomist, regarding her project to link organic growers in B.C. with their counterparts in Cuba, the first country in the world to undertake massive, government-supported conversion to sustainable organic agriculture. This latter project looks very exciting, and is evolving rapidly.