

and the incidence keeps growing as they age — made it seem unfeasible. But the *Annals* study adds to a growing body of literature supporting widespread ultrasound AAA screening in dramatically reducing deaths — and costs.

### MASS-IVE REDUCTION

The *Annals* study is a seven-year followup to the large UK Multicentre Aneurysm Screening Study (MASS) which found good evidence to support AAA screening. The study estimated benefits and cost-effectiveness of ultrasound screening for AAA in a population-based sample of 67,770 men aged 65-74.

MASS screened roughly half the men recruited for the study, the other half served as controls. The screened participants who were found to have AAA were either brought in for follow-up screening or offered surgery, depending on the size of the aneurysm (anything bigger than 5.5cm is usually repaired). After seven years, about 301 AAA-related deaths had occurred, 196 in the control group, 105 in the screened group — an astonishing 50% reduction in mortality.

### LET'S SCREEN

This finding makes Dr Thomas Forbes very happy. The vascular surgery chief at the London Health Sciences Centre thinks it's high time Canada had a nationwide screening program for AAA.

"At our practice, we're doing over 300 surgical interventions for AAA per year," he says. "Ten to 20% of them are for ruptures right now, and I think that we

# Cancer scandal puts path standards under the scope

*Confidence shattered after widespread faulty ER/PR testing revealed in Newfoundland*

BY DEANA STOKES SULLIVAN & GILLIAN WOODFORD

Shockwaves from the breast cancer testing scandal that's rocked Newfoundland are shaking up diagnostic standards in the province.

In late May Danny Williams' government was forced to admit that more than 300 flawed estrogen/progestin receptor (ER/PR) tests in the province had resulted in inaccurate diagnoses and treatment of breast cancer patients. At least 176 of the women are now dead.

The government is under fire because the admission came only after the affected women launched a class action lawsuit even though the government knew about the problem for the last two years. Newfoundland has now initiated a judicial inquiry to determine what happened.

In the spirit of a new culture of transparency, the health authority at the centre of the scandal, Eastern Health, quickly announced the unre-

lated suspension of a radiologist under review for 6,000 questionable reports on some 3,500 patients. The government provoked the ire of the reviewing physicians when health minister Ross Wiseman ordered them to complete their review in just two weeks.

The two shocking cases have those in health circles asking what happened — and what's next?

### CHILLING DISCOVERY

The problem came to light, says Dr Kara Laing, Eastern Health's cancer program clinical chief, when the situation of one patient who had a negative ER/PR test made her doctors question whether she might be positive. The test was reordered.

Meanwhile Eastern Health had installed a new automatic Ventana system in its immunohistochemistry lab. Before, testing was done using a more complex semi-automatic system. The second test with the new equipment confirmed the doctors' suspicions. Based on this, Eastern Health

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in Denver. Thaker's father, an electrophysiologist, suggests that people with pacemakers can use iPods but probably should keep the two devices away from each other.

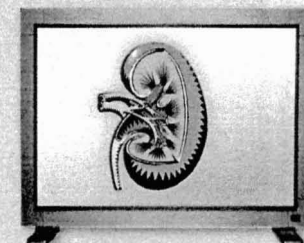
### Doc demands free plane tix for high flying care

MONTREAL — Helping patients can be its own reward — but maybe not if you are snoozing in your airplane seat as you get set for a vacation in Paris. Instead of enjoying an on-board movie, Henry Coopersmith, a Montreal family physician and lawyer, spent his trans-Atlantic flight first caring for two "anxious" patients and then filling out incident report forms, the *Montreal Gazette* reported. Unsatisfied with Air Canada's 15,000 Aeroplan-mile compensation, he is now demanding two free tickets in exchange for his work.

### Organ donor game show

AMSTERDAM — A new reality TV show has taken the genre to new lows, according to many outraged Dutch citizens. In "Big Donor Show," from the producers of the popular program "Big Brother," three ill contestants vie for the coveted prize: one kidney from a terminally-ill woman.

Viewers can send text-message suggestions



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NATIONAL REVIEW OF MEDICINE

## PATIENTS & PRACTICE

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# Pathologist dearth a factor in false results?

decided to do further retesting going back to 1997. Negative samples were sent to Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto for an independent review.

A court analysis signed by Dr Charles Hutton, a former provincial forensic pathologist and currently a deputy medical examiner and forensic consultant, suggests the number of false results could be as high as 366; 176 of these patients have since died. Although the cause of their deaths isn't known, 105 retests from these patients' tissue samples also confirmed false results.

### PATHOLOGY UNDER FIRE

No one knows yet how this happened, but the case has highlighted two big problems on the Rock: suboptimal testing standards and pathologist shortages.

Was Newfoundland using outmoded equipment? Not necessarily, says Dr Jagdish Butany, president of the Canadian Association of Pathologists (CAP) and a pathologist at the Toronto General Hospital. "Ten years ago, everyone was using semi-automatic systems," he says.

Dr Nash Denic, Eastern Health's chief pathologist for its laboratory program, says the health authority has since established a centre of excellence for breast cancer

pathology with a goal to improve standards. Eastern Health will also continue sending some samples to Toronto for quality control.

"What we should learn from this Newfoundland case is that we need quality assurance standards," says Dr Butany. "Ontario has standards in place already. Why not set up a national system?" He says CAP has struck a committee to look at standards nationwide and he hopes to get recommenda-

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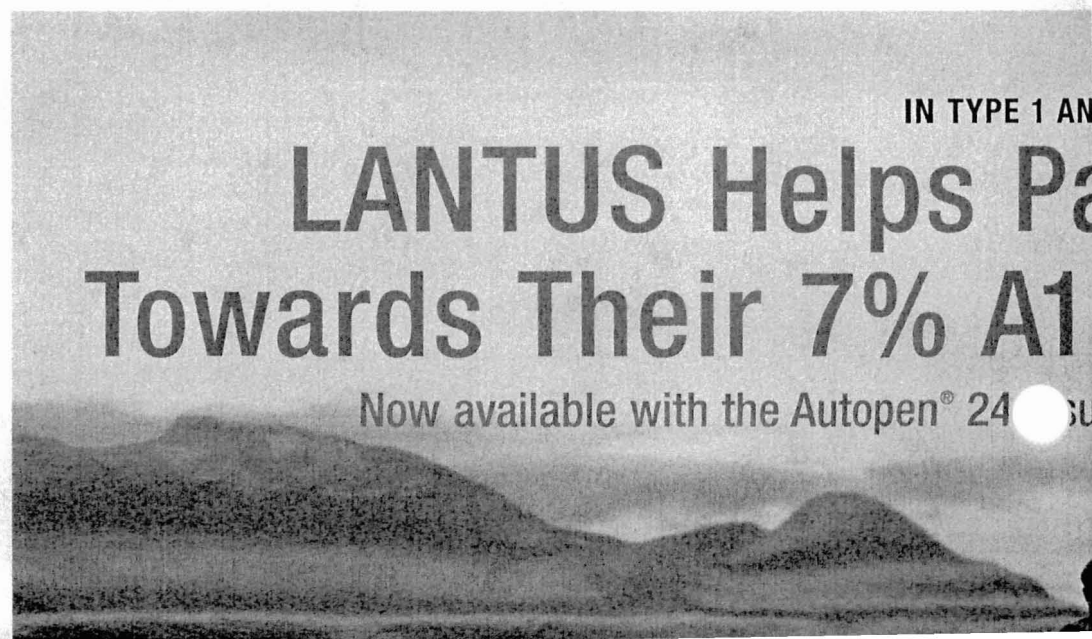
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The Newfoundland and

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## PATIENTS & PRACTICE

JUNE 15, 2007 **13**

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The Newfoundland and

Labrador Medical Association (NLMA) has been after the government about the pathologist shortage for years. An NLMA spokesperson emphasizes it's yet to be determined whether this shortage was a factor in the false ER/PR test results.

"The shortages shouldn't affect the quality of care," notes Dr Butany.

Health Minister Wiseman admits there's been a 50% turnover in pathologists since 1997. He says he hopes the province's new enhanced compensation package for pathologists will boost recruitment and retention.

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Five years ago Verna Doucette of Port au Port Peninsula, Newfoundland, was diagnosed with having a small, three-to-five centimetre cancerous tumour in her right breast. Today she's at the centre of the health scandal that's rocking the Rock.

Nearly five years ago to the day, Ms Doucette, who was 47 at the time, had an open biopsy which led to her being diagnosed with an infiltrating ductal carcinoma. Tests to determine if the tumour was receptive to hormone stimulation showed negative estrogen receptors

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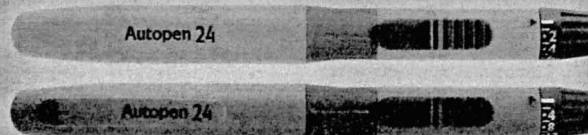
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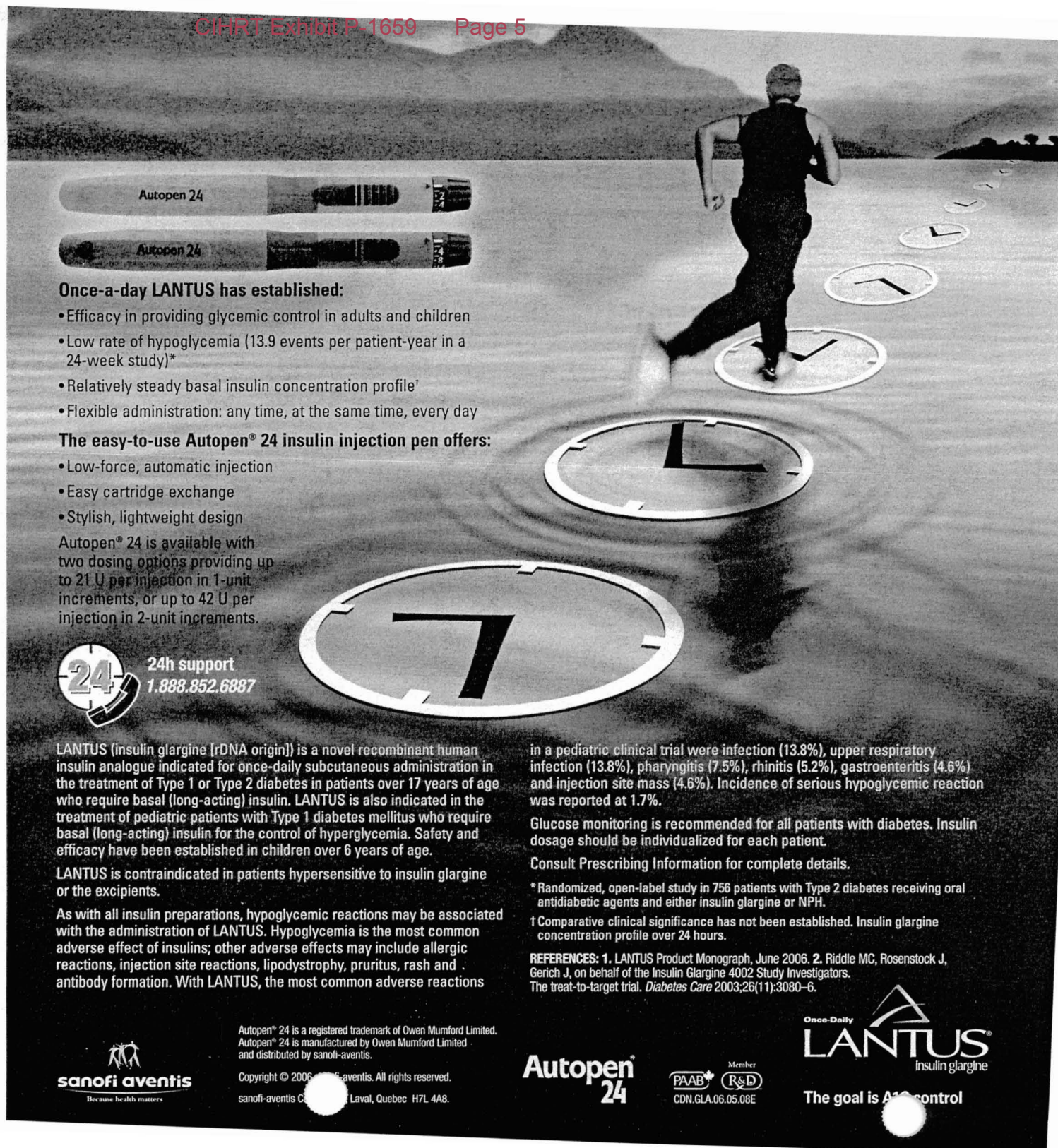
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Almost four years later, Ms Doucette received a letter from her oncologist telling her that her samples had been retested and the results were very different indeed. Estrogen receptors were now showing 60% and progesterone, 30%.

If this had been known earlier, Ms Doucette would have been offered tamoxifen, but instead she went through a six-cycle course of chemotherapy. The chemo brought on chest infections and reactivated an old tuberculosis infection.

Ms Doucette is the representative plaintiff named in the action lawsuit filed by lawyer Ches Crosbie on



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in a pediatric clinical trial were infection (13.8%), upper respiratory infection (13.8%), pharyngitis (7.5%), rhinitis (5.2%), gastroenteritis (4.6%) and injection site mass (4.6%). Incidence of serious hypoglycemic reaction was reported at 1.7%.

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Consult Prescribing Information for complete details.

\* Randomized, open-label study in 756 patients with Type 2 diabetes receiving oral antidiabetic agents and either insulin glargine or NPH.

† Comparative clinical significance has not been established. Insulin glargine concentration profile over 24 hours.

**REFERENCES:** 1. LANTUS Product Monograph, June 2006. 2. Riddle MC, Rosenstock J, Gerich J, on behalf of the Insulin Glargine 4002 Study Investigators. The treat-to-target trial. *Diabetes Care* 2003;26(11):3080-6.

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