

An Occasional Medical Newsletter from The Blood Care Foundation

Dear Member,

Pride goeth before destruction and an haughty spirit before a fall. As you will see from the first point in this 15th offering, you should never prophesy.

NvCJD.

Recently, I mentioned that the numbers of new cases of nvCJD appeared to be levelling off. The latest figures show this not to be true and the CJD Surveillance Centre in Edinburgh is warning that we might be seeing the start of an epidemic. In the first 9 months of last year, 6 new cases were reported as opposed to 10 cases in the whole of the 2 previous years. However, in the last 3 months of 1998, there were 6 new reports so that 1998 had a total of 12 cases overall, the highest figure since reporting started in 1995. (*CMO's Update*. 1999;21:4)

Chinese Herbal Creams.

11 "herbal creams", obtained from patients attending a GP's surgery were analysed, 8 of which were found to contain between 64 and 1500[?]/g (mean concentration ???g/g) of dexamethasone. Only 2 of the pots of cream had any indication as to what was the composition of the ointment and none indicated that they contained potent steroids. All of these ointments had been applied to sensitive areas of the face and flexures. It is concluded that "herbal remedies" should be subject to much tighter regulation, to prevent the illegal incorporation and prescribing of potent steroids. (*BMJ*. 1999;318:563-4)

New Names for Old.

At the end of 1997, the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) issued a document. It proposed that, in future, manufacturers should use the International Non-proprietary Name rather than the British Approved Name. This will probably come into force in the middle of this year, but here will be a 5-year transition period during which both names will appear on all labels. Amongst the more common drugs affected are adrenaline (to become epinephrine), frusemide (furosemide) and procaine penicillin (procaine benzylpenicillin). In all 250 substances will be affected. A complete list can be obtained from Mr Jeremy Mean of the MCA by quoting MLX 241 of 1997. His address is Room 1620A Market Towers, 1 Nine Elms Lane, LONDON SW8 5NQ, Tel: +44-171-273-0352. (*CMO's Update*. 1999;21:5)

***Chlamydia* Antibodies may Predict Heart Disease**

Plasma specimens, collected from 1773 males in the period 1979-83, were tested for antibodies to *Chlamydia pneumoniae*. An increased risk of death from ischaemic heart disease was associated with an increase in the level of IgA antibodies, but not IgG antibodies. (*BMJ*. 1999;318:1035-40)

Children Returning from the Tropics.

A recent survey of 216 children, returning to UK after living with their parents in tropical countries, 99 (39%) were found to be suffering from some disease. 23% had giardiasis, 10% an unexplained eosinophilia, 8% schistosomiasis and 8% had other helminthic infections. As only

21 of the children were symptomatic, the authors conclude that the routine screening of children returning from the tropics is worth while. (*BMJ*. 1999;**318**:568-9)

Immunisation of Health Care Workers.

It has been estimated by the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, that, in the USA, 100 – 200 Health Care Workers die annually from chronic hepatitis B. Far greater numbers become infected by vaccine-preventable diseases and pose a health threat to patients. The document entitled “Immunization of Health Care Workers” is extremely helpful in choosing the best immunisations for various groups. (*Suppl to MMWR*. 1997;**46**:RR-18)

Jap B Encephalitis Hits Malaysia.

Over 300,000 pigs have been slaughtered in the state of Negri Sembilan, which is situated some 90 km south of Kuala Lumpur. This follows an outbreak of Japanese encephalitis in which 154 cases have been reported and 56 deaths have occurred in Kuala Lumpur, Perak and Negri Sembilan. The outbreak has spread to Singapore where there have been 8 cases and one death. Pigs are the natural reservoir for the virus, which is transmitted to man via the bite of the *Culex* mosquito. Dr Kevin Palmer, WHO’s regional adviser believes that the epidemic is due to large numbers of pigs being kept in unsanitary conditions and surrounded by ditches full of stagnant water in which the mosquitoes breed. He said “Its like a bomb ready to go bang”. (*BMJ*. 1999;**318**:893)

Vaccine for Peanut Allergy.

Dr Kam Leong, professor of biomedical engineering at the Johns Hopkins Hospital , Baltimore, MD, has developed a new strategy for combating allergies. He has cloned the main allergenic peanut gene and has introduced this into a synthetic vector. The resulting vaccine will be taken orally in increasing doses. When the experimental vaccine was given to sensitised mice, the severity of the anaphylaxis, resulting from exposure to peanuts, was markedly reduced. (*Nature Medicine*. 1999;**5**:380, 387-91)

“Food Poisoning”?

We all connect food contaminated with *Escherichia coli* with food poisoning. However, a recent paper from Finland reports 14 cases in which children acquired the infection swimming in a lake which was slightly polluted. The authors point out that children learning to swim swallow quite a lot of water. (*Epidemiology and Infection*. 1999;**122**:1-5)

Adrenaline and Snake Bites

Although snakebites cause considerable morbidity and mortality, the use of the only effective treatment, antivenom, frequently produces adverse reactions including potentially fatal anaphylaxis. A prospective, double blind, randomised, placebo controlled trial, involving 105 patients in Sri Lanka, has shown that 0.25ml of 1:1000 adrenaline, administered sub-cutaneously prior to the antivenom, is markedly reduces the incidence and severity of adverse reactions. (*BMJ*. 1999;**318**:1041-3)

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