

## **An Occasional Medical Newsletter from The Blood Care Foundation**

Dear Member,

Clinical governance seems to be the flavour of the month. Having read all I can find about this matter, including *A first class service* and *Clinical governance: quality in the new NHS*, I am still a little hazy. However, if I am getting the message, it means that we all have to take the responsibility for improving the care we give to our patients and staff. To this end, I hope that this 16<sup>th</sup> offering will be of some assistance to you.

### **Death and Exposure to BSE**

The incidence of death from Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and similar dementias between 1979 and 1996 was compared between people whose occupation brought them into close contact with farm animals and the general population. The former group included butchers, farmers, farm workers, abattoir workers and vets. Although no difference was detected between the 2 groups, the authors issue a word of warning because the numbers of cases on nvCJD were very small and because of the uncertainty as to its incubation period. They point out the need for continued surveillance. (*BMJ*. 1999;**318**:1044-5)

### **NvCJD.**

The latest figures for new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (nvCJD) offer a little hope, following the scare in the last quarter of 1998. In the first quarter of 1999, only one new case was diagnosed. The figures since 1995 are; 1995 3 cases, 1996 10 cases, 1997 10 cases, 1998 16 cases and Q1 1999 1 case. (*CMO's Update*. 1999;**22**:3)

The National Blood Data Resource Center in the USA has just published its 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Report on the follow-up of patients who have been transfused with blood from donors who subsequently developed CJD. 228 recipients have been transfused with 300 donations from 17 donors who later developed CJD. Of the 135 who have died, the cause of death has been identified in 132 cases. In no case was the cause of death CJD related. None of the 93 surviving recipients show signs or symptoms of CJD, some of whom were transfused as long as 25 years ago. A subgroup of 17 survivors are of special interest as they were transfused within one year of the donor developing CJD and are, therefore, theoretically at the highest of disease transmission. Follow-up is to continue indefinitely. (*AABB News*. 1999;**April**:7)

### **Decline in US Blood Donations.**

The US National Blood Data Resource Center has recently reported that blood donations in the USA fell by 6% between 1994 and 1997. 12.6 million units were collected in 1997, which is 700,000 fewer than 1994. (*AABB News*. 1999;**April**:9)

### **Daily Intake of Vitamin C**

A recent report from the National Institutes of Health suggests that the recommended daily allowance for vitamin C should be raised from 60mg to between 100mg and 200mg. This is because of the increasing body of evidence that vitamin C has an anticancer potential. (*JAMA*. 1999;**281**:1415-23)

## **Rabies**

The incidence of rabies in the Philippines is increasing dramatically. 362 people died of rabies in 1998 compared with 321 in 1997. Approximately 10,000 dogs are infected each year. The problem is caused by a lack of veterinary anti-rabies vaccine, the belief that only wild animals can become infected and the habit of eating raw dog meat. If a dog bites someone, it will be killed but rather than a post-mortem being performed, it will be taken to the kitchen. (*BMJ*. 1999;**318**:1306)

## **Promethazine Prophylaxis and Snake Bites**

A sequential randomised, double blind, placebo controlled trial, involving 101 patients, who had been bitten by a bothrops snake has recently been reported. The researchers found no difference in the incidence or severity of anaphylactic reactions between those patients receiving intramuscular promethazine and those receiving a placebo 15 – 20 minutes prior to the intravenous infusion of antivenom. (*BMJ*. 1999;**318**:1451-2)

## **Fluid Intake and Bladder Cancer**

In a study covering a period of 10 years and involving 47,909 males, the 2 commonest types of bladder cancer were identified more than twice as frequently in those men who drank less than 5 glasses of fluid per day than in those who drank 11 glasses or more. (*New Engl.J.Med.* 1999;**340**:1390-7)

## **HHV8 and Kaposi's Sarcoma**

Although the link between human herpes virus 8 (HHV8) and Kaposi's sarcoma is strong enough to warrant calling HHV "Kaposi's sarcoma associated virus" no explanation has yet been validated for the mechanism by which HIV-1 dramatically increases the risk of this tumour developing in HIV-1 infected patients. Recent estimates have shown that HHV8 is found in more than 30% of South African blood donors. (*New Engl.J.Med.* 1999;**340**:1912-3)

## **Taking the Pulse**

Cardiologists are advocating a return to the manual estimation of the pulse rate as an important diagnostic tool. It can not only be used as a monitor of the effects of treatment, but it also functions as a risk factor, as it has been shown that all causes of mortality rise proportionately as the resting pulse rate exceeds 84 beats per minute. In addition, and probably more importantly, it helps to establish contact between the patient and doctor. (*Europ.Hrt.J.* 1999; **suppl H**:H1-84)

## **Tour de France**

Once again "Le Tour de France" will have us riveted to our seats for the next 3 weeks, marvelling at the sheer guts and determination exhibited by the riders as they punish their bodies in this 21 day marathon. Unfortunately last year the tour was marred by a drug scandal. Recent work has made cheating much harder. Tests for the misuse of steroids used to rely on urine analysis and some unscrupulous athletes had developed tricks to mask their drug misuse. Now scientists have developed a method of detecting drugs in hair, in which traces remain permanently. Watch out for the athlete with the shaved head! (*Forensic Sci.J.* 1999;**101**:209-16)

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