

An Occasional Medical Newsletter from The Blood Care Foundation

Dear Member,

I would like to start this 19th of my offerings by wishing you all the very best for the year 2000 and I trust that our transition into the 21st century, at the end of this year will be smooth. Y2K came and went more with a whimper than a bang. All our worries concerning the difficulties in getting into airports, failures of communications and general mayhem were, fortunately, unfounded.

British is Best?

In a prospective trial in which 5,579 patients received 21,923 units of blood, collected and processed at the North London Transfusion Centre, no cases of post-transfusion hepatitis B or C, HIV I or II, HTLV I or II were identified. In the light of this trial the risks of transfusion transmitted infections were revised. It is now calculated that the risk of acquiring one of the diseases mentioned above as a result of a blood transfusion is now:

	UK	USA
Hepatitis B	1:50,000 – 1:170,000	1:63,000
Hepatitis C	<1:200,000	1:103,000
HIV	<1:2,000,000	1:493,000

The conclusion of the authors is that blood in the UK is very safe. (*BMJ.* 2000;**320**:403-6)

Elimination of Filariasis

The World Health Organisation, together with a number of public and private agencies, launched a campaign in the middle of January to eliminate filariasis by the year 2020. In endemic areas over 50% of the population have some symptoms and 10% have elephantiasis. The first 3 countries to be targeted are Nigeria, Egypt and Somalia. Details of the programme are available at <http://www.filariasis.org/index.shtml>.

Genetically Modified Rice

A new strain of rice has been developed by genetic modification, which contains the genes required to make provitamin A. The new golden rice will be available free to the rice eating nations of the developing world, that is those communities, which need it most. (*Science.* 1999;**287**:303-5)

HIV and Oral Sex

A recent study in California and CDC Atlanta found that, in a group of 122 recently infected homosexual males, 7% had contracted their infection through oral sex. None of those so infected had understood that oral sex was a risk factor. (*7th Conference on Retrovirus & Opportunistic Infections*, San Francisco. 1999)

A Glass of Water

Scientists in Nashville have shown that a 500ml glass of water is an effective treatment for postural hypotension. This would cause a nor-adrenaline release causing the blood pressure to rise by 30mm Hg and was equivalent to 250mg of caffeine. (*Circulation.* 2000;**101**:504-9)

Rabies in India

Rabies is endemic in the dog population of India. Approximately 25,000 – 30,000 people a year die from rabies after being bitten by rabid dogs. People travelling to places of pilgrimage are advised to have preventive vaccination, since these sites are infested with stray dogs scavenging for left-over food. (*Tropical Doctor*. 1999;**29**:196-201)

The Cause for the Increase in Asthma?

Matricardi and colleagues have recently reported the results of their retrospective study on the correlation of exposure to faeco-oral infections and the incidence of asthma. The hygiene hypothesis, which postulated that the increase in the incidence of asthma was related to the decrease in exposure to infection, was undermined when no linkage was found between the rate of respiratory infections and the chance of developing asthma. This study measured the level of exposure to faeco-oral infections and correlated this with the incidence of asthma. They found an inverse relationship between the incidence of faeco-oral infections and asthma and postulate that exposure to microbes that stimulate gut lymphoid tissue may prevent atopy. If this is correct, why is Professor Pennington demanding that children, under the age of 5 years, should not visit farms. (*BMJ*. 2000;**320**:412-7)

Oral Rehydration for Cholera

In a prospective randomised clinical trial, it was reported that adding maize to the standard glucose based solution used in the treatment of cholera has been found to decrease the duration and severity of the diarrhoea. (*New Engl.J.Med*. 2000;**342**:308-13)

Tamoxifen Toxicity

Until recent months, Tamoxifen has not been associated with any major side effects. Evidence is now appearing that even low doses can cause irreversible changes in the eye. Patients on Tamoxifen are recommended to have annual eye checks. (*Eye*. 1999;**13**:729-33)

An Acceptable Alternative

A group of researchers from Texas have found that a handful of jellybeans is as reliable as the traditional glucose drink when performing a glucose challenge test. They performed trials on 136 pregnant women and found that 28 jellybeans were the standard dose. The beans come in a choice of 9 colours and 10 flavours. (*Am.J.Obstet.Gynecol*. 2000;**181**:114-7)

Was James Bond Right?

James Bond was the picture of health, not being afflicted with cataracts, stroke or cardiovascular disease. A recent paper suggests that this was because he took his martinis shaken rather than stirred. The research showed that shaken martinis were more effective in deactivating hydrogen peroxide than those, which had been stirred, and both were more effective than gin or vermouth alone. After a great deal of research, and probably numerous hangovers suffered in the name of science, the researchers were unable to identify the reason, but they did discover that martinis, even when shaken, were less effective than Scotch whiskey or good white Sauvignon. (*BMJ*. 2000;**320**:1600-2)

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