

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

Dear Member,

Welcome to this, my 23<sup>rd</sup> newsletter. As a member of the Foundation you are obviously interested in health care around the world. I was amazed by the results of the World Health Organization (WHO) survey and I wonder if you will be as well.

### **WHO Survey**

Where is the best place in the world to be ill? According to the recent WHO survey, it is France. The other top 10 countries were, in alphabetical order, Andorra, Austria, Italy, Japan, Malta, Oman, San Marino, Singapore and Spain. The analysis, which used five performance indicators, showed that it is not how much you spend, but rather how you spend the available resources that is important. The report can be accessed at [www.who.int/](http://www.who.int/) or purchased from WHO for SwFr15. (*The World Health Report 2000 – Health Systems: Improving Performance*)

### **UK Department of Health Web-site**

The DoH has developed a web-site on which a number of important documents are available. Recent examples, which may be of interest to you, are “Health Advice for Travellers” in May, “CJD statistical figures” in April and “Use of Meningococcal Group C Conjugate Vaccine” in March. The web-site address is [www.doh.gov.uk/new.htm](http://www.doh.gov.uk/new.htm). (*CMO’s Update*. 2000;26:8)

### **St John’s Wort**

St John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) is an herbal remedy, which is becoming increasingly popular as a remedy for mild depression. However, even though it has been used for centuries, its mechanism is still unknown. What is certain is that there are important examples where an interaction occurs with some commonly used drugs. In some cases the action is depressed, as with warfarin, many oral contraceptives and digoxin and in other cases the action is enhanced, such as triptans and serotonin re-uptake inhibitors. A useful table is to be found in Current Problems. (*Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance*. 2000;26:6-7)

### **Missed Myocardial Infarction**

A recent survey of patients presenting with chest pain of unknown cause, who were sent home when physical examination and ECG were normal, showed that 7% had myocardial damage. This was found by measuring troponin T levels. (*BMJ*. 2000;320:1702-5)

### **Recreational Drugs and Neurological Damage**

Ecstasy is neurotoxic if taken in high enough doses. Although the clinical effects of taking moderate doses is unclear, a recent study from Germany suggests that regular use impairs memory, attention, and the ability to learn. (*J.Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry*. 2000;68:719-25)

## **Recreational Drugs and Heart Damage**

A recent double blind trial of cocaine against placebo demonstrated that cocaine enhances platelet aggregation and therefore the risk of thrombosis. In addition cocaine causes hypertension, coronary artery spasm and arrhythmias. Other recreational drugs, which have similar effects, are amphetamines and ecstasy. (*Heart*. 2000;**83**:688-95)

## **From Where Should You Take Blood?**

When you need just a drop of blood, such as that required for a random glucose test, the usual site was to prick the thumb with a lancet. However, a recent trial has found that, taking blood from this site is more than four times as painful as taking blood from the ear lobe. The failure rate from both sites was low. (*BMJ*. 2000;**321**:20)

## **HIV in India**

The National AIDS Control Organisation, India's top government agency responsible for tracking HIV cases, has admitted to publishing inaccurate figures. For example, the number of HIV positives in Kerala was reported to be 215 in 1996 and this figure has remained static. In the Punjab the figure has remained at 65 for more than 2 years in spite of a sentinel screening programme showing that there are more than 3.5 million HIV positives in India. (*BMJ*. 2000;**321**:402)

## **Lyssavirus in Australia**

In August 1996 a young woman was bitten on the finger by a fruit bat whilst at a barbecue in Australia. More than 2 years later she died of a rabies-like illness. This is the second reported case of bat lyssavirus in Australia, where all bats are potential carriers (*Med.J.Aust.* 2000;**172**:597-9)

## **A New Way of Slimming?**

Recently a group from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, USA, have developed a new molecule that regulates appetite. The fatty acid synthetase inhibitor C75 is such a good appetite regulator that mice treated with a little as a drop reduced their food intake by 90%. In addition they lost weight. The researchers are now gearing up to see whether this molecule will have the same effect on humans. If so, this might be the answer to the problems of obesity with which we are now beset. (*Science*. 2000;**288**:2379-81)

## **CJD and Blood Transfusion**

A systematic review of the results from five case-controlled studies shows no evidence that CJD can be transmitted by blood transfusion. In fact patients with CJD appear to be less likely to have had a transfusion than the control group. This apparently spurious result illustrates the need for caution when interpreting studies of variant CJD and blood transfusion. (*BMJ*. 2000;**321**:17-9)

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