

An Occasional Medical Newsletter from The Blood Care Foundation

Dear Member,

When I prepared my first newsletter just over 4 years ago, I little expected these occasional musings to continue, or how much articles on the world wide web would influence our medical practise. However, these newsletters seem to be appreciated and so the quarter century has been reached and I welcome you to this, my 25th newsletter.

Research in Developing Countries

WHO estimates indicate that \$50-60bn is spent on health research worldwide. However, of this total only 10% is spent on those diseases which affect 90% of the world's population. Between 1975 and 1997, of the 1233 new medicines patented, only 1% were for tropical diseases. Most research into an AIDS vaccine concentrates on the variants found in North America and western Europe despite over 90% of cases occurring in the developing nations. The latest WHO report states "There are too few market incentives to invest in an AIDS vaccine that would be effective in developing countries" as Africa accounts for only 1% of world drug sales. The report goes on to state "The effect of research and spending gaps is devastating: malaria, tuberculosis, and AIDS cause 5 million deaths a year, most of them in developing countries". (*World Development Report 2000/2001.*)

HIV/AIDS

Two articles were juxtaposed in a recent number of the British Medical Journal. One reported that the FDA had decided to maintain the ban on homosexual men donating blood, no matter how long it was since their last encounter. The other that the South African government has run into further difficulties with regard to its attitude to the AIDS epidemic and its refusal to admit that there is a connection between HIV infection and AIDS. The health minister, Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, is basing her argument on a chapter in a book written by William Cooper, who has ties with the Ku Klux Klan. In this book he states that AIDS was started by a world conspiracy of the "Illuminati", a fictitious group supposedly made up of Jews, bankers and communists. (*BMJ.* 2000;**321**:722)

Information from the Chief Medical Officer

Many pamphlets and sets of guidelines cross ones desk each week, but one that I always find useful is the CMO's Update and the latest is no exception. Among the helpful pieces of information are the new guidelines for hepatitis B infected workers (www.doh.gov/coinh.htm, www.doh.gov.uk/nhsexec/hepatitisb.htm and e-mail: hugh.nicholas@doh.gsi.gov.uk) and guidance for the management of viral haemorrhagic fevers (www.open.gov.uk/doh/vhf.htm and e-mail: gerry.robb@doh.gsi.gov.uk). Finally there is an excellent note on the hazards of treating *E.coli* O157 with antibiotics. The verotoxin produced by *E.coli* O157 is a major cause of the haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS) in children. *In vitro* studies have shown that some antibiotics increase the amount of verotoxin released and so increase the chance of HUS. Treatment of diarrhoea in children due to *E.coli* O157 should not be treated with antibiotics. Further information can be obtained from Dr Judith Hilton, e-mail: judith.hilton@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk. (*CMO's Update No 27 August 2000, N.Engl.J.Med.* 2000;**342**1930-6)

What do you have in your Doctor's Bag?

Another useful pamphlet is produced by the Consumers' Association. In the latest edition, they give some very useful advice on the drugs we should have in our Doctor's Bags. The areas covered include analgesics, opioid overdose, asthma, infections, vomiting, psychiatric emergencies, diabetes, anaphylaxis and myocardial problems. (*Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin*. 2000;**38(9)**:65-8)

West Nile Virus

In my 21st Newsletter I described the outbreak of West Nile virus infection, which claimed 6 lives in New York last year. There has now been an outbreak in Israel and 12 people have died since August. The worst area is around Sharon, north east of Tel Aviv. (*BMJ*. 2000;**321**:724)

Exercise

It has long been recognised that exercise is associated with a decreased risk of coronary heart disease. Two recent studies show that short bouts of physical activity are just as effective as longer workouts. The important point is to raise the heart rate by at least 75% above the baseline. Small amounts of exercise, with an energy expenditure of only 1,000kcal per week, reduced the risk of heart disease by 20%. (*Circulation*. 2000;**102**:975-80, 981-7)

What to do with Leeches

How should leeches be removed from body cavities such as the nose, throat, urethra or vagina? A simple remedy is to make up a saturated solution of common salt in a plastic bottle and then squirt a jet of fluid onto the leech, which will quickly die and fall off. (*Tropical Doctor*. 2000;**30**:102)

Child Safety

Having been the leading advocates for fencing off swimming pools, Australia is now advocating providing similar protection to toddlers on driveways. Over 8% of pedestrian children killed by cars are run over by the family car reversing on their own driveway. (*Med.J.Aust.* 2000;**173**:192-5)

Mammography v Physical Examination

A controversial Canadian study involving 39,405 women reports that, although mammography plus physical examination yielded a lead time of 2.1 years over physical examination alone in the early detection of breast cancer, this did not translate into longer survival. By the end of the study there were 107 deaths in the mammography group as opposed to 105 in the controls. (*J.Nat.Cancer Institute*. 2000;**92**:1490-9 and criticism on News Extra@bmj.com)

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