

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

Dear Member,

Even when I was at my fittest, when doing the parachute Selection Course, running more than 100 metres was a marathon. Now I am trying to keep fit during the 6<sup>th</sup> decade, running is even more difficult. Imagine my delight when I came across an article, which showed that I would burn at least as much energy by walking a mile at 8.0km/hour as I would by running the same distance. (*J.Sports.Med & Phys.Fitness.* 2001;**40**:297-302) With great relief, I welcome you to Newsletter No:31.

### **Current Vaccine and Immunisation Issues**

The worries concerning the safety of MMR vaccine continue to niggle on in spite of the welter of scientific evidence that has been produced. An excellent review on this, as well as other issues with regards to vaccines and immunisation was issued on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2001 by the Department of Health. Other topics covered include meningitis C, influenza and the management of anaphylaxis. Copies can be ordered from DoH at [doh@prolog.uk.com](mailto:doh@prolog.uk.com) or can be downloaded from <http://www.doh.gov.uk/cmoh/cmoh.htm>.

### **DNA Vaccines**

DNA vaccines offer an exciting new approach to inducing immunity as well as providing a therapeutic tool for viral infections and cancer. One advantage of DNA vaccines is that they activate all the immune pathways, especially cytotoxic T-cell responses, which have always proved difficult to induce with normal protein vaccines. DNA vaccines against hepatitis B, HIV, falciparum malaria and hepatitis C are now in clinical trial. (*Vox.Sang.* 2001;**80**(1):12-8)

### **Cholera Vaccines**

For those of us who are not constantly dealing with infectious diseases, we may still believe that all cholera vaccines are ineffective. This is confirmed in an excellent review article, in which the most important point is made that you do not die from the disease cholera, but rather the resultant dehydration from the diarrhoea. The effective treatment is simple rehydration. The best prevention is care with what is eaten and drunk. (*J.Trav.Med.* 2001;**8**(2):82-91)

### **Arm Cleansing**

Few of us ever consider the effectiveness of the technique we use prior to taking a blood sample. For most procedures this is not too important, but when the sample is for a blood culture, sterility is vitally important. The technique is even more important when a donor's arm is being prepared for a blood donation, as any bacterial contamination of the donation can lead to fatal consequences, especially if platelets are to be prepared. A group from the North London Blood Centre recently surveyed the various procedures available. They found that the optimal disinfection technique, which should be considered "best practice", was given by the Medi-Flex, a device which delivers a combination of alcohol and iodine. This reduced bacterial counts by 99.79%. (*Vox Sang.* 2001;**80**(3):135-141)

## **Schistosomiasis**

Schistosomiasis is one of those diseases with which we are more likely to come in contact as more of our patients go on holiday to those parts of Africa where the disease is endemic. Joubert et al have produced an excellent review of the pathology, modes of infection, clinical features, diagnosis, treatment, risk factors and preventative measures. (*J.Trav.Med.* 2001;**8**(2):92-9)

## **Infected Blood Donors**

A recent survey of volunteer and replacement blood donors in Ghana found that 15% of donors had hepatitis B and the incidence of HIV was 2.4% and that of hepatitis C, 2.3%. One of the major problems is that only HIV testing is funded by central government. The remainder of the tests have to be funded by the local authority or the patients themselves. As a consequence relatively insensitive screening tests are used and so there is a serious risk of infected units not being detected and being transfused. (*Vox Sang.* 2001;**8**(3):142-7)

## **Ginger and Pregnancy**

It has always been believed that it was an old wives tale that ginger reduced nausea and vomiting in early pregnancy. Seventy Thai women were given either a placebo or a preparation containing 1g of ginger daily for 4 days. There was a marked decrease in the nausea and vomiting in the ginger group but none in the controls. (2001;**97**:577-82)

## **Climate Change**

In 1999 the Department of Health convened an Expert Group to assess the likely health effects, which would arise from the predicted climate change over the next 50 years. Their report has been published and will soon be available on the DoH web site. Whilst they expect deaths from cold weather to fall, malaria will again become endemic in UK and food poisoning will increase. Further details can be obtained from Dr RL Maynard, Tel: 0207-972-5118 or e-mail: [robert.maynard@doh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:robert.maynard@doh.gsi.gov.uk)

## **Sport and Stretching**

A recent large randomised trial and a systematic review both conclude that stretching does not prevent exercise induced injury. Basic science would tend to indicate that even mild stretching can cause muscle damage at the cellular level. (*Western.J.Med.* 2001;**174**:282-3)

## **Vitamins and Alzheimer's**

Elderly people with low blood levels of folic acid and vitamin B<sub>12</sub> may well be at increased risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. It may well be worth while monitoring the levels of these vitamins in patients over 65 years of age. (*Neurology.* 2001;**56**:1188-94)

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