

An Occasional Medical Newsletter from The Blood Care Foundation

Dear Member,

This is the fourth of an occasional series of newsletters to draw your attention to items which have recently appeared in the Medical Literature and which may well have some bearing on the medical precautions you take during your travels.

Hepatitis G.

The hepatitis story has become more and more complicated as years go by. First we had the Australia antigen, then hepatitis A and B, then non-A, non-B hepatitis, then C, D and E arrived and now we have G. Hepatitis G can be transmitted by blood transfusion and is often associated with the hepatitis B and C viruses. A recent review found that some people infected with hepatitis G had disturbed liver enzymes but many did not. (*J.Clin.Path* 1997;**50**:1-2)

Now that polymerase chain reaction tests are available for the investigation of Hepatitis G, a study has been performed on stored serum samples taken from blood donors and transfusion recipients. The hepatitis G virus was found to be present in 1.4% of donors and was the only virus found in 0.3% of cases of hepatitis, but this does not necessarily mean that the G virus was the causative organism in these cases. None of these cases went on to develop chronic hepatitis and the emerging consensus is that the G virus is an innocent bystander and a threat to no one. (*New Engl.J.Med.* 1997;**336**:747-54)

Myocardial Infarction.

If a member of your company has a myocardial infarction whilst overseas, how soon is safe to fly him or her home? A recent report based on the data collected by a number of international medical assistance companies shows that the present recommendation that repatriation be delayed for four weeks is excessive. The article analysed the medical records of 196 patients who were transported home on commercial airline flights, on average 17 days after the infarct occurred. 186 of the patients had no problems at all, 9 had mild symptoms, but one, whose case was complicated by gastro-enteritis, died 8 days after his return. (*Aviation, Space and Environmental Medicine* 1996;**67**:976-82)

Every year over 60,000 people in the USA are examined in emergency departments for "cocaine associated chest pain". Early reports of this clinical entity showed that cocaine could cause "myocardial infarction" type pain in people without coronary heart disease. However a recent analysis of 70 patients who had myocardial infarctions associated with taking cocaine found that most had pre-existing coronary disease. (*Amer.J.Med.* 1997;**102**:158-63).

HIV.

The problem of HIV and AIDS in South Africa has reached epidemic proportions. By the end of 1992 over 300,000 people were infected and by 1994 this had risen to an estimate of over 1.2 million. In one University Hospital the rate of HIV positivity in the antenatal clinic rose from 12% to 23% between 1992 and 1996. (*BMJ.* 1997;**314**:1077-83).

Typhoid Fever.

The World Health Organisation has recently reported that 92% of the reported 5,000 cases of typhoid in Tajikistan are resistant to all the standard antityphoid drugs. It is feared that the total number of cases could reach 60,000. (*BMJ.* 1997;**314**:994)

Ebola Fever.

The current outbreak of Ebola Fever in Gabon, in which there were 60 cases and 45 deaths, seems to be over. The last patient died on 18th January 1997 and no new cases have been reported. (*World Health Association Weekly Epidemiological Record.* 1997;**72**:71)

Polio Vaccination Programme.

Between 1980 and 1994 there were 133 cases of paralytic polio in the USA. The live attenuated oral Sabin vaccine caused 125 of these (94%). The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have now issued new guidelines for the administration of polio vaccine. These call for a sequential vaccination schedule with doses of the dead inactivated Salk vaccine being given at 2 and 4 months, followed by the oral Sabin vaccine at 12 to 18 months and a booster dose of oral vaccine at 4 to 6 years of age. This revised schedule is expected to cut the incidence of vaccine associated paralytic polio to between two and five cases a year. (*BMJ.* 1997;**314**:465)

TB.

A warning has been issued by The World Health Organisation that the drug resistant strains of tuberculosis, which are being bred in Russian prisons and forced labour camps, are being spread to surrounding districts as prisoners are released. The prison population in Russia is in excess of one million, of whom it is estimated, about 25,000, suffer from TB. (*BMJ.* 1997;**314**:846)

Now the Good News.

A prospective study of over 3,750 people, aged 65 years or more, showed that during the first 3 years of the study only 0.9% of those who drank 3 to 4 glasses of wine per day developed senile dementia or Alzheimer's Disease. This compared with 4.9% of non-drinkers, 5.1% of those who drank 1 to 2 glasses of wine per day and 1.6% in those who drank 5 or more glasses per day. (*La Revue Neurologique.* 1997 quoted in *BMJ.* 1997;**314**:997)

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