

An Occasional Medical Newsletter
from The Blood Care Foundation
Number 51

Dear Member,

I trust that you all had an enjoyable time during the Festive Season and that 2004 will be a happy and prosperous one for you. Whilst surfing the net during the holiday, I came across an unusual site www.thebookseller.com. They were holding a competition to discover the oddest book title of the year. Amongst the nominations were *The Big Book of Lesbian Horse Stories*, *277 Secrets Your Snake Wants You To Know*, *The Voodoo Revenge Book* and *Hot Topics in Urology*, which, at that time had achieved 15% of the vote.

Nature's Cures.

At some time, lemons, garlic, virgin olive oil and the African potato (*Hypoxis*) have all been thought to have a beneficial effect on certain diseases. The Medicines Control Council of South Africa has prematurely terminated a study on the anti-carcinogenic effects of the potato in HIV positive patients because of bone marrow suppression. *Hypoxis* induced suppression has been confirmed experimentally in the feline immuno-deficiency virus model. (*S.African Med.J.* 2003;**93**:798)

AIDS 2003.

The *AIDS Epidemic Update 2003*, which can be viewed at www.unaids.org, makes horrific reading, and should be studied by everybody who has an interest in Health and Human Resources. Amongst the facts are that there are estimated to be 40 million people infected with HIV, of whom 2.5 million are children. There were 5 million new infections, approximately 14,000 per day, and 3 million deaths from AIDS. It is expected that, by 2010, the number of children orphaned as a result of AIDS will rise, from the current figure of 11 million, to 20 million. This will mean that a third of the world's orphans will result from AIDS and 20 % of all the children in countries such as Botswana, Swaziland and Zimbabwe will be orphaned.

Dangers of Herbal Creams.

A recent report from Birmingham showed that, of 24 herbal creams purchased in health shops, all but 4 contained steroids, 14 of which were classified as potent or very potent. All creams labelled Wau Wa and two called Muijiza contained clobetasol. Wau Wa probably contains 20% Dermovot and, if the package insert instructions were followed, which state that the cream should be applied "all over", then a 3 year old child would be at risk of adrenal suppression. (*Arch.Dis.Child.* 2003;**88**:1056-7)

Ephedra Banned by the FDA.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has banned all food supplements containing ephedra. 155 deaths and over 16,000 adverse events have been notified in association with this herb, which contains amphetamine. Ephedra containing supplements are widely used as slimming aids. This is the first time that the FDA has banned a dietary supplement since herbs and herbal preparations came under its jurisdiction following the 1994 Dietary Health and Supplement Act. (www.fda.gov)

Salt Can Increase Cancer Risk.

A study of over 18,000 Japanese men over a period of 11 years looked at alcohol intake, diet and smoking habits. The annual intake of highly salted foods such as salted fish roes and salted fish preserves was strongly correlated to the incidence of gastric cancer. (*Brit.J.Cancer.* 2004;**90**:128-34) This article can also be viewed at www.bjcancer.com

MMR Vaccine and Bowel Disease.

Data from linked hospital statistics reveal that there has been no increase in the incidence of Crohn's disease during the period 1979 – 99. The prevalence had been rising in the previous decades so it would appear that the causative factor for the increase is no longer operative. The incidence in the last cohort before the routine provision of measles vaccine (children born in 1962-7) was no different from that in the first to receive the measles vaccine (children born in 1967–72). This finding is important in the light of the claims that much of the publicity over the adverse effects of the MMR vaccine was linked to the hypotheses that Crohn's disease was due to persistent measles infection. (*J.Epidemiol.Com.Hlth.* 2003;**57**:883-7)

Does it Matter When You Eat?

Weight gain is usually due to calorie intake being greater than calories usage, so how much we eat is an important factor in whether or not we are overweight. Does the time of day influence our appetite? The findings of a recent survey found that eating in the morning fills people up more than other times and can lead to an overall reduction in daily food intake. Late night snacking fails to satisfy hunger and can lead to an increase in daily intake. (*J.Nutrition.* 2004;**134**:104-11)

Coughing Reduces Injection Pain.

Many tactics have been tried to distract patients and reduce the pain of injections. These include hypnosis, counter-pressure and even jokes, but all have failed. Now a recent report claims a high success rate with the simple strategy of getting the patient to cough. As the needle comes into contact with the skin the patient is encouraged to cough vigorously. The authors suggest that coughing causes momentary increase in blood pressure and they claim that hypertension can reduce pain perception. Another study claimed that coughing relieves pain whilst blood is being taken. (*Brit.J.Plastic Surg.* 2004;**57(4)**:376 and *Anaes.Analg.* 2004;**98**:343-5)

Penicillin may not Benefit Children with Sore Throats.

Zwart and colleagues studied 156 children who were complaining of sore throats, 96 of whom were positive for group A streptococci. The children were randomised to receive penicillin for seven or three days or to receive a placebo. They found no difference between the groups in terms of duration and recurrence of symptoms, pain and days off school. They conclude that treating sore throats in children with penicillin may not be beneficial. (*Brit.Med.J.* 2004;**327**:1324)

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