

An Occasional Medical Newsletter from The Blood Care Foundation Number 56

Dear Member,

None of us involved in Travel Medicine can have not been both touched by and involved in the problems, which followed the Tsunami on Boxing Day last year. But just as the fisherman in the Indian Ocean were unaware of the wave that passed them only to devastate their homes, how many of us were unaware of the tidal wave that killed over a million in Bangladesh in 1970 and how many people realise that over a million children die from malaria each year. It takes a group of rock stars to remind us of the grinding poverty in which a large percentage of the world's population live. What can we do to help? Firstly we can all lobby our companies to contribute men and material to providing the basic requirements for the people of Africa and South America, such as clean water and proper sanitation and then, when we retire, perhaps we should consider spending a few months of our well earned rest in one of the impoverished countries, imparting our skills to the local people so that they can raise the standards within their own country.

Malarial Vaccine.

A Phase II study has reported possible efficacy of a vaccine against *Plasmodium falciparum* malaria. The study was performed on young children in Mozambique and there was a reduction of nearly 30% in the number of children developing at least one episode of malaria between the vaccinated and the control group. (*Lancet*. 2004;**364**:1411-20)

Antioxidants and Gastrointestinal Cancer.

The Cochrane review team have recently conducted an analysis of all trials where patients' diets were supplemented with antioxidants with a view to lowering the risk of developing gastrointestinal cancer. The antioxidants included carotene, vitamins A, C and E and selenium. None of the supplements were found to prevent oesophageal, gastric, colorectal or pancreatic cancer. In fact there was some evidence that these supplements may, in fact, increase the chance of developing cancer. (*lancet*. 2004;**364**:19-28)

Oral Antiplatelet Therapy for Vascular Disease.

A recent systematic review of all published randomised controlled trials recommends aspirin as the first line therapy for patients following simple myocardial infarction. Aspirin or clopidogrel is recommended for transient ischaemic attacks or ischaemic stroke, chronic stable angina or peripheral vascular disease. (*JAMA*. 2004;**292**:1867-74)

Adjuvant Chemotherapy for Breast Cancer.

Gianni Bonadonna and his colleagues have recently reported the results of the 30-year follow up of the effectiveness of adjuvant chemotherapy in the prevention of relapse in operable cancer of the breast. The main findings were that the use of a combination of cyclophosphamide, methotrexate and fluorouracil reduced the relapse rate by approximately 20%, six cycles were as effective as twelve and in patients who were both node negative and oestrogen receptor negative the use of adjuvant chemotherapy reduced both the relapse rate and mortality by approximately 35%. The side effects were described as minimal. (*Brit.Med.J.* 2005;**330**:217-20)

Mammography.

In the same journal as Bonadonna's results were published, Olsen's group reported on a ten year cohort study on the effectiveness of mammography screening in Copenhagen. The overall mortality declined significantly when compared with the predicted outcome prior to the introduction of screening. When comparing the mortality after adjustment for age, time period and region they found that the screening programme led to an overall population reduction of around 25% and this was increased to 37% among women who had actually been screened. (*Brit.Med.J.* 2005;**330**:220-3)

Rabies and Transplantation.

Six patients received organs from a young woman who was incubating rabies. The young woman had contracted the disease whilst in India, but showed no symptoms at the time of her death. Of the six recipients, one who received a lung transplant has died, two are critically ill but three who received either corneas or liver show no signs of the disease.

Effectiveness of a New Cholera Vaccine.

A new, orally administered recombinant cholera vaccine designated rBS-WC, has been shown to be highly effective even in areas where there is a high prevalence of HIV. The results of a trial in Beira, Mozambique, where the sero-prevalence of HIV is between 20 and 30%, showed a 78% protection against cholera infection. (*New Engl.J.Med.* 2005;**352**:757-67)

Fluid Treatment of Children with Gastroenteritis.

A randomised controlled trial compared oral with intravenous rehydration therapy in children with mild to moderate dehydration caused by gastroenteritis. There was no difference between the two groups in the ability to correct the dehydration but hospital admission was less common in those given oral fluids as these could be administered more quickly. (*Pediatrics.* 2005;**115**:295-301)

The Root of the Atkins Diet.

The French lawyer and politician Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, in his book *Physiologie du Gout* instructed his readers to avoid starch, sugar and flour based foods as a cure for obesity.

The First Female Doctor.

The first woman to qualify and practise as a doctor in Britain had to change both her name and gender. "James Barry" qualified in 1812 and worked for 40 years as a medical officer in the British Army, rising to the rank of Surgeon General. She is reputed to have joined the army to follow her fiancé to South Africa, but, unfortunately, he died before her arrival. During her career she fought one duel and sought many more. Her true identity was only revealed after her death in 1865, the year in which the first official female medical student, Elizabeth Garrett, graduated. (*J.Epidemol.Comm.Hlth.* 2004;**58**:726)

Friday, 20 October 2006

Michael JG Thomas
MA, MB, FRCP (Edin), DTM&H
Clinical Director