

An Occasional Medical Newsletter from The Blood Care Foundation

Dear Member,

May I commence my ninth newsletter with wishing you a very happy and prosperous 1998.

Hong Kong Avian (H5N1) Influenza

As of 16th December 1997, 8 confirmed cases, and one probable case, of illness due to the H5N1 subtype of influenza virus have been reported in Hong Kong. There have been no cases reported outside Hong Kong. The UK Health Departments' Influenza Advisory Committee has met and advised that no special precautions are, at present, advised for people travelling to and from Hong Kong. Doctors who require further information can find it on the PHLS Internet site at <http://www.open.gov.uk/cdsc/flufact.htm>. (*CMO's Newsletter PL/CMO/97/3* dated 17th December 1997)

It is now felt that the H5N1 subtype is highly unlikely to cause a pandemic. The strain is not new, having first appeared in South Africa in the 1960's and since then has caused numerous epidemics in poultry. Until 26th January 1998 there have been 18 confirmed cases with 6 deaths reported to the World Health Organisation, with no new cases reported after 17th January. There is no convincing evidence to date of human to human spread. (*BMJ*. 1998;**316**:325)

Acute Shortages of Blood in India

Blood banks and hospitals throughout India are reporting an acute shortage of blood since the Supreme Court ban on paid donors came into effect on January 1st this year. Patients have had to be refused admission to hospital and doctors have expressed fears that the ban will drive the trade in paid blood underground. India's annual demand for blood is about six million units but volunteer blood banks manage to collect only about three million units. Of the remainder about a third comes from paid (professional) donors, and the rest from "replacement donors"—the relatives or friends of patients who replace blood needed in emergencies. (*BMJ*. 1998;**316**:172.)

Eating Fish is Right

A recent study in the USA of 20,551 men, aged 40 to 84, showed that eating fish at least once a week halves the risk of sudden cardiac death. The risk of dying within one hour of the onset of a cardiac event was 52% lower in those who ate fish at least once a week when compared with those who had fish less than once a month. (*JAMA* 1997;**279**:23-8)

Blood Donations Fall in Scotland

Blood donations in Scotland fell by 4% in 1996-97 when compared with the previous year. The number of first time donors also fell, in spite of a continually rising demand for blood and blood products due to advances in medical practice and extended life expectancy. Demand for platelets showed the greatest rise, 10% for than in 1995-96. (*SNBTS Annual Report 1996-97*)

New Blood Service in Canada

Following the four year inquiry headed by Mr Justice Krever, and to which I gave evidence, the federal government has set up a Blood Safety Council to ensure that the 50 recommendations,

contained in the final report, are implemented. Should anyone want to read this, it comes in 3 volumes and runs to over 1150 pages. I know, I am trying to find a home for my copy. The emphasis in the new service is to be safety rather than financial expediency. (*BMJ*. 1997;315:1564)

New Variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (nvCJD)

Until the end of 1997, there have been 23 cases of nvCJD reported in UK. This is to be compared with 135 cases of classical CJD which have been reported in the same period. (*CMO's Update 17* dated February 1998)

Multiple Drug Resistant Tuberculosis

A recent WHO study has shown that over a third of the countries surveyed have levels of multiple drug resistant tuberculosis between 3% and 22%. The highest levels were in Argentina, Estonia, the Henan province of China, the Ivory Coast, Latvia and Russia. (*TB Treatment Observer*. 1998;4:1.)

HIV in China

China is introducing a national prevention plan to attempt to halt a possible pandemic of HIV. By the end of 1996 the official media admitted that there were about 200,00 cases in China. In January 1998 the Ministry of Health stated that they would attempt to keep the number of cases below 1.5 million by 2010, but Arthur Holcombe, resident co-ordinator for the UN in China warned that the number of cases could exceed 10 million. (*BMJ*. 1998;316:493)

Rabies

In Israel, pet cats as well as dogs now have to be vaccinated against rabies. This follows the death of a 3rd person from rabies in past 13 months, whereas there had been no deaths in the previous three decades. (*BMJ*. 1998;316:248)

Sleep

Recent studies in the USA have shown that young adults should sleep for 8 to 9 hours each night. A survey of 1007 young Americans showed that those who averaged less than 7 hours sleep per night were bothered by daytime sleepiness. (*Am.J.Public Health*. 1997;87:1649-53)

Melatonin for Jet Lag

There have only been 6 clinical trials on the use of melatonin in combating jet lag and the total number of patients is less than 200. Melatonin is not licensed in any EC country, but is available in the USA and Singapore although there are no controls over purity. On the limited published evidence, it can be concluded that melatonin possibly reduces the severity and duration of jet lag. There is no data available on the long term safety and no clear evidence on when or how it should be taken. (*Drug & Therapeutics Bulletin* 1998;36:15-6)

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