

Serious adverse events associated with perinatal drugs

An average of 243 children under the age of 2 years die each year in the United States as a result of drugs used during the perinatal period. Seventeen drugs accounted for more than half of all cases of serious and fatal adverse events in children treated directly with them.

The analysis was based on 7111 reports of adverse drug reactions in infants and children between November 1997 and December 2000. The reports were culled from more than 500 000 MedWatch adverse event reports that doctors and drug companies are required to file with the US Food and Drug Administration.

The reports were analysed for outcome (death, hospital admission, and congenital abnormality), principal suspect drug, and whether the route of exposure was direct administration or from the mother in the perinatal period.

The analysis, which has been published in *Pediatrics* on the web ahead of print publication (www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/110/5/e53), was carried out by Dr Thomas Moore and colleagues at George Washington University, Washington, DC.

Of the average 243 deaths a year associated with drug treatment, 100 (41%) occurred during the first month of life and 204 (84%) during the first year.

In a fifth of all reported adverse events, exposure to the drug was through the mother during pregnancy, delivery, or breast feeding. Congenital abnormality or disability was the most common outcome, occurring in 41% of the reported cases.

Four drugs accounted for 38% of all 769 reported deaths: the monoclonal antibody palivizumab (113 cases; 15%), nitric oxide (87 cases; 11%), intravenous indometacin (78 cases; 10%), and cisapride (24 cases; 3%). Cisapride was widely used to treat infants with gastro-oesophageal reflux but was withdrawn from the market in 2000.

Scott Gottlieb *New York*



Exhibition shows the "poor ruined faces of England"

An exhibition of the work of war artist Henry Tonks shows some of the horrific injuries sustained by soldiers in the first world war.

Tonks, who taught at the Slade School of Art from 1892 to 1930, was particularly well qualified to record the injuries because he had trained as a surgeon before becoming a painter.

He drew most of his portraits of soldiers, which he referred to as "the poor ruined faces of England," when he was a lieutenant in the Royal Army Medical Corps attached to the Cambridge Hospital at Aldershot during 1916-7.

The picture (detail) on the left shows a soldier from Nigeria who was wounded in September 1917 by a gunshot that destroyed his lower lip and chin and carried away the floor of his mouth. The picture (detail) on the right shows a soldier who was wounded in Mesopotamia by a bullet that perforated the bone above the eye then carried on through the lower jaw and left side of the lower lip.

"Henry Tonks: Art and Surgery" is in the Strang Print Room, University College London, and is open Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday afternoons until March 2003 (tel 020 7679 2540).

Annabel Ferriman *BMJ*

India must change health priorities to tackle HIV

India could have between 20 million and 25 million people infected with HIV by 2010, the highest number for a single country, says an unclassified US intelligence report. It has also identified China, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Russia as other countries set to experience the "next wave" of the HIV epidemic.

The report from the US National Intelligence Council said it would be difficult for any of the five countries to limit the growing epidemic by 2010 with-

out major shifts in priorities. In all five countries, the report said, risky sexual practices are driving infection rates upward, health services are inadequate, and the cost of education and treatment would be overwhelming.

The report has also cautioned that, as the costs of anti-retroviral drugs drop in these countries, drug resistant strains of HIV may spread, because of "the inconsistent use of anti-retroviral therapies and the manufacture of unregulated, substandard drugs."

Indian doctors say the projections for their country seem exaggerated but concede that greater access to anti-HIV drugs could lead to faulty prescription practices that might set the stage

for the emergence of drug resistant HIV strains. "We're already beginning to see irrational prescriptions," said Dr Sanjay Pujari, director of the HIV unit at the Ruby Hall Clinic in Pune, Maharashtra.

The cost of drugs used against HIV has dropped in India from 8000 rupees (£104; \$166; €164) a month to 1600 rupees a month. "But it is unfortunate that medical practitioners have to depend a lot on information from pharmaceutical companies to write prescriptions of antiretroviral therapies," said Dr Alka Deshpande, head of the department of medicine at the Grant Medical College in Mumbai.

The Indian government's own estimates put the current number of people infected with HIV at four million, and the health ministry had earlier this year announced a plan to achieve "zero level of transmission by 2007." Some doctors have described that goal as unrealistic and unachievable.

The US intelligence report has said that, among the five "next wave" countries, Ethiopia and Nigeria would be the hardest hit, with a prevalence among adults projected at 20%. Ganapati Mudur *New Delhi*

US public health system needs major overhaul, says report

The US Congress needs to establish a national public health council to advise the government on public health issues and to review the policies of other agencies for their impact on the national health, says a new report from the Institute of Medicine.

More reliable funding, improved organisation, and better coordination with other government agencies are needed, says the report. It urges public health agencies to develop public and private sector partnerships to work with the present system and devise new public health strategies.

"We have tried to marshal the evidence and argue why these