

DC On-Line (Chiropractic Research)

Brian Sutton, DC

Wonder Drug Turns Deadly

Research published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* a few years ago indicated that the Japanese cardiovascular medication vesnarinone decreased mortality in patients with severe heart failure by 62 percent. In that study of 700 patients, the therapeutic dose was 60 mg. However, because of a slightly higher mortality rate among volunteers receiving twice that amount, the FDA decided a larger, better-designed study was called for. That was done by the University of Minnesota Medical School, which tested the drug on 3,800 patients with severe heart failure. This time, 60 mg per day RAISED the death toll by 23 percent when compared to placebos. Halving the dosage cut the death rate attributable to vesnarinone in half. Researchers report that "there is no subgroup in whom the drug is safe,"¹ with deaths usually resulting from fatal arrhythmias.

1. Dr. Jay Cohn of the University of Minnesota, reporting to the American Heart Association's meeting in New Orleans, November 13, 1996.

Tiger Soup

London's Environmental Investigation Agency is voicing concerns that Indian tigers are facing a formidable threat from Eastern medical suppliers. The tiger population has been cut nearly in half during the past seven years. They have been hunted for their body parts, used for ingredients in traditional medicines in China, Japan, Hong Kong, and Korea. An average of one Indian tiger is taken every day to supply remedies such as "tiger penis soup."²

2. Reuter, October 22, 1996.

Secondhand Smoke -- Pronounced Effect on Children's Oxygenation

A New York City medical center,³ studying the oxygen needs of children aged 1-10 after surgery, has found a pronounced effect of secondhand smoke. Using a pulse oximeter to assess blood O₂ levels, physicians ordered oxygen therapy as needed. Researchers later queried the parents about their own smoking habits and then compared the statistics. They found that while only five percent of the children from nonsmoking households were prescribed oxygen therapy, it was given to 48 percent of the group that had at least one smoking parent.⁴

3. Maimonides Medical Center, N.Y.

4. Presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Anesthesiologists.

Women Wake Sooner

A study presented at the American Society of Anesthesiologists annual meeting has found that women recover from anesthesia twice as fast as men. Given the same dose per body weight, women were awake in half the time after their surgery. This research was done on 274 patients undergoing orthopedic or lower abdominal surgery. Doctors have no explanation for the phenomenon.⁵

5. Associated Press, October 23, 1996.

Fruits and Vegetables Decrease Blood Pressure

A Johns Hopkins University study reports that a diet high in produce quickly decreased blood pressure readings in volunteers to the extent one might hope to achieve with medication. Within two weeks, members of the group that each day consumed 9-10 servings of fruits and vegetables and three servings of low-fat dairy products showed very significant improvements in their readings. Patients with more severe hypertension seemed to benefit the most.⁶

6. Presented at the American Heart Association's scientific conference in New Orleans, November 13, 1996.

Leptin Slims Mice, Not Humans

The widely publicized discovery of leptin, the hormone-like substance that causes fat mice to slim down and exercise more is again becoming less exciting. One Israeli study now links the compound to Type II diabetes. While it seems to be a miracle drug in leptin-deficient mice, humans seem to have a different reason for becoming obese. Lack of leptin has not been a factor in studies to date. In fact, one biochemist involved in the study says that obese individuals quite often have high levels of the chemical in their bloodstreams. Now, this study finds that the introduction of additional leptin seems to disrupt insulin metabolism, creating changes similar to those seen in adult-onset diabetes.⁷

7. Science, November 14, 1996.

Don't Blame Depression on Menopause, Says Physician

A female physician writing in the British Medical Journal⁸ says that after reviewing numerous studies done in various parts of the world, she thinks that the blame menopause gets for depression is not justified. In fact, it seems that depression is more prevalent among women during childbearing ages. As a corollary, she maintains that hormone replacement therapy is not an effective method of dealing with depression in postmenopausal women.

8. Dr. Myra Hunter, in an editorial in BMJ, November 16, 1996.

Exercise Those Bones

Another study has strengthened the notion that exercise is a good way to combat osteoporosis. This Finnish work examined 98 women between the ages of 35 and 45, relatively sedentary at the start of the research. Half of the group was assigned a program of high-impact and step aerobic exercises three times per week. Both groups had a similar dietary intake of calcium and other nutrients. The exercisers increased their bone mass from 1.4 to 3.7 percent (varying according to body site) during the study.⁹ Some experts urge caution at becoming too enthusiastic about this study, however, because of the difficulty in motivating patients to exercise.

Exercise helps to build bone mass by stimulating growth of the fibrous support structures that are in turn mineralized by calcium salts and other compounds. Osteoporosis occurs when these fibers are broken down, releasing their mineral content to the bloodstream. This is in contrast to osteomalacia, where the basic bone structure is intact but too little calcium is available for mineralization.

9. The Lancet, November 16, 1996.

Caffeine for Postoperative Headaches

According to doctors from the Mayo Clinic in Scottsdale, Arizona, caffeinated drinks taken shortly before surgery can decrease the incidence of headaches while recovering from the procedure. Or, you can ask your doctor to administer intravenous doses of caffeine immediately afterward. The researchers found that the caffeine equivalent of two cups of coffee decreased patients' suffering significantly. Why does it work so well? It turns out that most of the headaches in the study group were due to caffeine withdrawal resulting from pre-surgical fasting orders.¹⁰

10. Reported at the Annual meeting of the American Society of Anesthesiologists in New Orleans.

Identifying Alcoholics

A new method of screening for alcoholism researched and testing in Cambridge, Ontario uses an indirect questioning method to expose drinkers who might otherwise hide their problem from physicians. The method begins by giving the patient a questionnaire that includes questions about certain injuries during the past five years. The patient is asked about fractures or dislocations, traffic injuries, head injuries, or any involvement in an assault or a fight. Patients responding affirmatively to two or more questions are then carefully asked about alcohol consumption and symptoms of alcoholism. Through this process, researchers say, they can identify about 70 percent of alcoholics.¹¹

11. Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research, November 15, 1996, authored by Dr. Yedi Israel of Thomas Jefferson University's medical school.

HIV-Resistant Prostitutes

A 10 year study of Nairobi prostitutes has found 43 women who are "stubbornly resistant"¹² to the HIV virus. These women, 10 percent of the study group, probably each had about 500 unprotected exposures (about once per week on average) to the virus blamed for the AIDS epidemic. Since their DNA does not exhibit the characteristic thought to protect one percent of Caucasians from the virus, researchers as of this writing have no idea what their secret is.¹³

12. Reuter, November 14, 1996.

13. The Lancet, November 16, 1996.

Computer Injuries Up

Chicago's Coalition for Consumer Rights is blaming computers for a very large percentage of on-the-job injuries. During the past two years, they report that one study found that two-thirds of all new job injuries were computer related.¹⁴ Injuries ranged from repetitive stress injuries to outright equipment explosions. They claim that 75 percent of all people who work with computers suffer from some kind of injury, though many are not debilitating. Most affected are service and retail trade workers, especially women. Fortunately, I'm not in their high risk group, but maybe I should raise my disability insurance just in case ...

14. United Press, November 13, 1996.

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