

"DC" On-Line

Brian Sutton, DC

Nicotine up Your Nose

A new gimmick is about to be marketed to smoking addicts: the nicotine nose spray. When the craving strikes, you can squirt the equivalent of one milligram of nicotine into your nose to get relief. Unfortunately, FDA officials warn that the spray itself is likely to be addictive. One participant in the three month efficacy study was found to be plotting ways to obtain a year's supply of the stuff. FDA guidelines specify that it should be used no longer than six months.¹

1. Associated Press, March 25, 1996.

Pass the Watercress

A researcher presenting one of many food-related papers at a March American Cancer Society Seminar² says that watercress contains a substance that inhibits at least one cancer-causing effect of smoking on the lungs. The compound, identified as PEITC, seems to block activation of a tobacco-related carcinogen. The study examined metabolites in 11 smokers who consumed two ounces of watercress with each meal. The same substance is also found in Chinese cabbage and turnips.

2. Dr. Stephen Hecht of the American Health Foundation, Valhalla, NY.

FDA Reclassifies Acupuncture Needles

The FDA relaxed controls on acupuncture needles the end of this past March, opening the door for better insurance coverage for acupuncturists. The needles were reclassified from experimental devices to medical tools, an action that should remove a major objection voiced by various insurance carriers.³

3. Associated Press, March 29, 1996.

Gulf War Neurology

The Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry⁴ has published a paper by a British scientist who reports neurological deficits in Gulf War veterans. He used electro-diagnostic testing of the peripheral nerves of volunteers who complained of unexplained illnesses and found abnormalities in all of them. Civilian subjects used for comparison all tested negative. The author

hypothesizes that a combination of anti-chemical weapon drugs and vaccinations resulted in permanent organic damage.

4. JNNP, March 27, 1996.

Mad Cow Pesticide

At the Edinburgh International Science Festival in April, a farmer who is also a biological researcher explained his theory that organo-phosphate compounds may be responsible for the current problem with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). Mark Purdey says that a blend of the compounds in a base of thalidomide that was mandated to farmers in the 1980s wreaked havoc with nerve structures in cattle. The chemicals bind with neurological enzymes and affect cell membrane proteins, and depending on the specific areas affected, may lead to BSE, Alzheimer's symptoms, or motor neuron disease. His contentions and refusal to use the compounds have triggered legal action by the Agriculture Ministry as well as attacks on his farm and person.⁵

5. Reuter, April 6, 1996.

Drug Study Halted

A study of a drug used during open heart surgery to minimize side effects of the operation was stopped prematurely after eight of the 75 patients taking it died. The drug nimodipine, a calcium channel blocker, was expected to minimize side effects such as brain dysfunction (often permanent) seen in half the patients who undergo the procedure. It appears that a side effect of the drug is "major surgical bleeding."⁶

6. Stroke, April 4, 1996, published by the American Heart Association.

Smoking and Cervical Dysplasia

A study of 82 smokers finds that cessation of the habit can improve pap smear results. Researchers conducted pap smears at the beginning of the study, and compared them at a later time when a number of the subjects had cut back on their habit. They found that 80 percent of the women who had quit or greatly reduced their consumption of cigarettes showed improved scores. The study is reported in The Lancet.⁷

7. The Lancet, April 6, 1996.

Early Sex and Cervical Cancer

A panel of the National Institutes of Health issued a report in April that warns of a much greater susceptibility to cervical cancer in women who became sexually active before age 18. They say that the adolescent reproductive tract structure is especially vulnerable to cellular changes prompted by human papilloma virus infection. HPV is transmitted sexually, and its presence has long been

associated with cancerous changes.

Doctor Glut Projected

A paper appearing in the New England Journal of Medicine⁸ concludes that there is a growing surplus of medical physicians in the United States. By the year 2000, the number of doctors treating patients will have doubled compared to 1970 levels. Most of the growth is in specialty areas, as the percentage of doctors in general or family practice has been steadily declining; currently only about one out of every three doctors is in general practice. Nearly one quarter of physicians practicing in the U.S. have been trained in another country. If that weren't enough to make finding work difficult for a new doctor, more and more services that were customarily done by physicians are now being performed by support professionals.

8. NEJM, April 4, 1996.

Alcohol-Triggered Metastasis

Animal studies at Ohio State University suggest that a single episode of binge drinking can trigger the spread of tumor cells throughout the body. Researchers found that the effect, which doesn't occur until the blood alcohol level reaches .2 percent, is that the "natural killer" cells' activity is reduced to 1/40th normal. These cells normally eliminate roaming tumor cells, so their diminished effectiveness can result in a tumor spreading to another location in the body. The NK cells can recover quickly at first when the alcohol is cleared from the bloodstream, but repeated episodes seem to cause permanent damage. These findings may help explain why heavy drinkers suffer from such high cancer rates.⁹

9. Nature Medicine, April 1996.

Digitalis Investigated

For about 200 years or more, digitalis has been used by doctors to treat weakened hearts. Because it has been used so long, it escaped the heavy scrutiny modern medications are supposed to endure. But the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute decided it was about time to do some formal testing. Instead of trying to decide if the drug increased contractility of the heart, however, this work studied their effect on overall mortality. The good news is that digoxin recipients are slightly less likely to die from heart failure. The bad news is that they are more likely to die from cardiac arrest and heart attacks. Overall, there is basically no change in mortality, the study finds.¹⁰

10. These results were released March 26, 1996 at the annual meeting of the American College of Cardiology.

Genetic Defects Not Uncommon

Given the current rage of genetics being blamed for nearly every disease known to mankind (seems that way sometimes, anyway), researchers were surprised to find that a genetic mutation that "causes" many follicular lymphomas seems to be present in about half of the normal population. The study was done on 132 seemingly healthy blood donors. The findings were announced at the 38th Science Writers Seminar.¹¹

11. San Francisco, March 25, 1996, as reported by UPI.

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