

DC On-Line

Brian Sutton, DC

Deadly Heart Test

In the largest study to date of right heart catheterization, researchers find little benefit and a significantly high risk of death when patients undergo the procedure. The surgery, which involves inserting a balloon-tipped catheter into the neck and guiding it down a vein into the right atrium of the heart to allow diagnostic measurements, increases deaths by 21 percent during the subsequent 30 days. The procedure has been in use for 25 years and now generates more than \$2 billion each year. While not discounting the possibility that the procedure might help some patients, Dr. Alfred Connors of the University of Virginia said that his study of 5,735 patients failed to find any who did actually benefit. Rather, he found increased deaths from infections and fatal arrhythmias from tissue irritation.¹

1. JAMA, September 18, 1996.

Fewer Boys in Denmark

A study by the Danish National Research Foundation concludes that since 1950, the proportion of boy babies relative to girls in Denmark has been steadily declining. In a letter to The Lancet medical journal,² one of the researchers notes that some pesticides (notably dibromochloropropane) are known to reduce sperm counts and lead to an increased proportion of female offspring. Other studies have been published that report lowering sperm counts in many areas of Europe.

2. The Lancet, September 21, 1996.

Crowding Promotes Ill Health

The National Center for Infectious Diseases reports an unusually high rate of meningococcal disease in the community surrounding the Los Angeles County Jail. During a time when the jail was packed 40 percent above capacity, nine inmates came down with the condition. At the same time, 45 residents in the surrounding county were diagnosed with the same ailment. An analysis in the New England Journal of Medicine³ blames the outbreak on crowded conditions in the jail, which in turn spread to the outside community. Tests showed that nearly 20 percent of the prisoners were carriers. A large number of the county residents that become ill had recent close contact with men who had been in the jail.

3. NEJM, September 19, 1996.

Turkey Antibiotics Causing Resistance

Researchers are worried that a new drug being developed to treat bacteria resistant to vancomycin (the last antibiotic effective against many hospital-acquired infections) will be obsolete before it becomes licensed in the United States. The new drug, Synercid, belongs to the same class of pharmaceuticals as Virginiamycin, a chemical routinely fed in low doses to commercially raised turkeys. Their tests found that as the turkeys grew, they harbored bacteria that were increasingly resistant to both Synercid and Ampicillin. Evidence has been mounting that suggests bacteria that infect different species, (e.g., humans versus certain animals), are able to share their resistance.⁴

4. Presented at the Interscience Conference on Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy in New Orleans, September 18, 1996, by researchers from William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Michigan.

Fungal Resistance

You've heard about the alarms being raised over the increased resistance bacteria are exhibiting to the medical world's once- mighty antibiotic arsenal. Now fungi and other microbes are proving to be just as well adept at neutralizing pharmaceutical assaults. In just the past five years, experts say, molds and yeasts have evolved at "historically unprecedented" levels.⁵ They have found ways to resist all three major classes of drugs that have been in widespread use to date. The number of hospital related fungal infections doubled during the 1980s, according to the CDC. The main factor driving these adaptations seems to be, of course, over utilization of those same drugs.⁶

5. Dr. Thomas Walsh of the National Cancer Institute, Associated Press, September 17, 1996.

6. American Society for Microbiology Annual Conference in New Orleans, September 1996.

Soya for Health

BRUSSELS, Belgium -- At the Second International Symposium on the Role of Soya in Preventing and Treating Chronic Disease, 60 speakers discussed evidence that soya is helpful for cardiovascular health, in prevention of breast cancer and a number of other chronic disease processes. A number of large studies are underway to quantify the benefits, but proponents say that soya's nutritional content is so great that it doesn't make sense to wait for conclusive scientific documentation to take advantage of its benefits.⁷

7. Reuter, September 18, 1996.

Cholesterol Levels Can Be Depressingly Low

A paper published in the British Medical Journal⁸ supports earlier works that correlate low blood cholesterol levels with feelings of depression and hopelessness. A 17-year study of 6,000 working men found a high rate of suicide in men with low blood levels of cholesterol. A smaller study of post- partum mothers published in the same edition found a strong relationship between lowered

cholesterol and depression. Other studies have suggested that artificially lowering blood cholesterol levels impairs brain function and increases the risk of a violence-related death.

8. BMJ, September 14, 1996.

Cyclical Asthma

A study at the Medical College of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia finds that the frequency of a woman's asthma attacks is related to her menstrual cycle. Women in this study sought emergency room treatment twice as frequently near the end of their menstrual period than at any other time. The researchers suggest that hormonal stress may be an important factor in asthma. However, severity of the attacks did not seem to be related to the cycle.⁹

9. Archives of Internal Medicine, September 9, 1996.

Chocolate Good for the Arteries

A researcher from the University of California at Davis¹⁰ says that some of the same substances found in wine that act as cardiovascular tonics are also present in chocolate. Lab tests show that chocolate phenolics have an antioxidant effect on LDL cholesterol, much as those found in red wine. This research, published in *The Lancet*,¹¹ finds that 1.5 ounces of milk chocolate has the same amount of antioxidant phenolics as a 5 ounce glass of red wine. I think I'll take a double dose of each just to be safe.

10. Wine chemist Andrew Waterhouse.

11. *The Lancet*, September 21, 1996.

Satiety Index

Research conducted at the University of Sydney in Australia may help you to choose foods that are more filling for a given number of calories. Volunteers consumed exactly 240 calories' worth of various foods and from their lessened hunger pangs created a "satiety index," a measure of how much fuller they felt after each food. The best food all-around was determined to be the potato, offering the highest satisfaction per calorie. Whole- wheat bread was 50 percent more filling than white; fish fared better than chicken or lean beef. Popcorn was twice as filling as peanuts or candy. In the fruit department an orange or apple works better than a banana. Croissants are a no- no: you need to eat seven times as much (calorie-wise) as potatoes to lessen your appetite.¹²

12. Associated Press, September 11, 1996.

PCBs and the ABCs

Psychologists at Wayne State University in Detroit report that children exposed to PCBs in-utero (from contaminated fish consumed by their mother) exhibit lowered IQ scores by the time they

reach their teens. They found a three-fold increase in the number scoring low on intelligence tests at age 11 among the group that had the highest exposure. That same group also lagged considerably far behind in reading comprehension, memory, and attention span.¹³

13. New England Journal of Medicine, September 12, 1996.

Zinc for Growth

Another research project at the University of California at Davis finds that a slight deficiency of dietary zinc will limit growth and bone mass development in females, even if caloric intake is normal. This study, done on adolescent primates, finds that growth stunting occurs before lowered blood levels of zinc are detectable.¹⁴

14. United Press, September 9, 1996, reporting on the work of Mari Golub et al.

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NOVEMBER 1996