

## **An Occasional Medical Newsletter from The Blood Care Foundation**

Dear Member,

Many people have been overjoyed that, using a rabies pet passport, they can legally take their dog with them on holiday to the continent. Although the threat of imported rabies has been removed, I wonder how many of us have considered the implications of our pets bringing back brucellosis, heartworm, leishmaniasis or Mediterranean spotted fever. These diseases are potentially fatal for our pets and are not much fun for us if we contract them.

### **To Stitch or not to Stitch?**

James Quinn and colleagues from San Francisco have shown that conservative treatment to cuts on the hand of less than 2cms length healed as well and was faster and less painful than the tradition treatment involving suturing. (*BMJ*. 2002;**325**:299-300)

### **Better Blood Transfusion.**

The new National Guidelines on the appropriate use of blood "*Better Blood Transfusion – Appropriate Use of Blood (HSC 2002/009)*", known in the trade as BBT2, was published in July. It can be viewed at [www.gov.uk/blood/bbt.htm](http://www.gov.uk/blood/bbt.htm)

### **Climate Change and the Effect on Health.**

*Health Effects of Climate Change in the UK* was published on 1<sup>st</sup> August and contains a detailed study of the effects likely to take place until 2050. It concludes that, while temperatures are predicted to rise, winters may be wetter and severe winter gales may increase in frequency. Hot summers will bring an increase in food poisoning, sunburn, skin cancer and heat-associated deaths in the elderly. The advice is "Keep clean, keep cool, keep covered". The report can be found at: [www.doh.gov.uk/airpollution/climatechange02/index.htm](http://www.doh.gov.uk/airpollution/climatechange02/index.htm)

### **Aspirin, Teenagers and Reye's Syndrome.**

The UK Medicines Control Agency has raised the recommended minimum age, below which children should not be given aspirin, to 16 because of its links with Reye' syndrome, a rare but potentially fatal disorder found almost exclusively in children and adolescents. Since 1986 the use of aspirin in children under 12 has been banned. The age was raised to 15 in April this year. The full statement is available at [www.mca.gov.uk/](http://www.mca.gov.uk/)

### **Animal Bites and Infection.**

Although a recent survey showed that 42% of animal bites were from dogs and only 11% from cats, the cat bites are potentially more serious. *Pasteurella multocida* is a common contaminant of cat bites, so penicillin should be given immediately in addition to a tetanus booster. If rapid improvement is not seen further medical intervention is essential. (*J.MDU*. 2002;**Oct**:22-3)

### **Alzheimer's Disease and Fish.**

Elderly people who eat fish at least once a week run a substantially lower risk of developing dementia, and especially Alzheimer's disease, than those who do not. The incidence was over 6.5 times higher in those who never ate fish than in those who ate it daily. The risk reduction was 3 times in those who ate fish at least once a week. It is believed that the n-3 fatty acids contained in fish oil reduce inflammation in the brain and could have a role in the regeneration of nerve cells. No such risk reduction was found in relation to the consumption of meat. (*BMJ*. 2002;**235**:932-3)

### **Sitting Down During Pregnancy.**

A prospective study of 1,222 pregnant women found that the number of hours spent standing during the working day was the only factor significantly associated with low birth weight. Prolonged standing is thought to reduce venous return and arterial pressure, which in turn reduces uterine blood flow. (*J.Occupat.Environ.Med.* 2002;**44**:815-21)

### **Heart Disease in Black Americans.**

Researchers have linked 2 common gene variations with a higher risk of congestive heart failure among black Americans than other Americans. Black people carrying copies of both the  $\beta_2$  and the  $\beta_1$  adrenoreceptors are 10 times as likely to suffer from heart failure as those who carry neither. The risk associated with carrying one of the variants is 5 times. (*New Engl.J.Med.* 2002;**347**:1135-42)

### **Work Stress and Cardiovascular Death.**

A 28-year study in Finland has shown that both high job strain and effort-reward imbalance increase cardiovascular mortality. People with high job strain, especially if associated with low job control, had a 2.2-fold increase in cardiovascular mortality risk. (*BMJ*. 2002;**325**:857-60)

### **Allergies.**

The hygiene hypothesis proposes declining exposure to infections is linked to a rising incidence of allergies. Data from the 3<sup>rd</sup> national health and nutrition survey shows that exposure to certain infections, mostly foodborne, is associated with a lesser probability of suffering from hay fever or asthma. (*J.Allergy & Clin.Immunol.* 2002;**110**:381-7)

### **Tetanus Prophylaxis.**

New advice on the treatment of tetanus prone injuries has been published. Travellers to areas where medical attention may not be readily available, and who had their last dose of vaccine more than 10 years ago, are advised to have a booster dose. This is a precautionary measure in case there is no availability of tetanus immunoglobulin. The full revised schedule is published in Annex 2 to the Update of Immunisation Issues from the Chief Medical Officer, 2002.

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