Global Update

News in Brief

Technology watch

Chipping in: What was science fiction 50 years ago is transforming into reality today. Our identity and summary may just end up as numbers on a silicon chip. And the laziest and slowest field to wake up to the information revolution "medicine" is also stirring. Beginning January 2006, all persons in Germany will carry an electronic card. This will have administrative data about patients' insurance status, their rights to be treated abroad, and their prescriptions. The medical data is optional and will contain only information to which the patient agrees, such as drug intake, data for emergencies (blood group, chronic diseases, and so on), previous operations, radiography findings, or doctors' letters. Patients can also include their own health documentation, such as a disease diary. So when a German sees a doctor, or buys a drug, a permanent record will be created. (BMJ 2004; 329: 131 (bmj.com 17 July 2004).

Alternative medicine

Fishy happenings: For years hundreds of chronic asthmatics in India have thronged to Hyderabad annually to swallow a live fish with secret medicine placed in it. What it is which is placed in the fishes mouth is shrouded in secrecy. Now Dr. Venkat Rao, Chairman of the Charminar branch of the IMA in Hyderabad has filed a writ against the distribution of this medicine. Critics of the practice feel that anything other than food given for cure is subject to the Drugs and Magical Remedies Act 1954 and ingredients must be disclosed to the consumer. The Goud family of Hyderabad which makes the secret medicine is loath to disclose the constituents which have been passed down the generations since 1845. But under court order the medicine is now under analysis in 3 different laboratories. We await the end of this fishy tail (BMJ 2004; 328: 1457 (19 June).

Drug watch

Heart work: Someone had the ingenious idea to inject bone marrow derived stem cells into the coronaries of patients with fresh myocardial infarction. Good results with mice meant trials with humans began quickly. The Lancet recently published the study by Kai Wollert et al where they compared this therapy with controls. In the study group which got intra coronary stem cells, left ventricular ejection fraction improved by 6.7% versus 0.7% in controls. The initial hypothesis of how it works is that adult stem cells retain the potential to transdifferentiate into different tissues. But basic scientists are now scrutinizing other possible mechanisms like angioneogensis and paracrine effects of the stem cells. In mans everlasting search of eternal life, the stem cell may be a valuable partner (The lancet 10 July 2004).

Gouri Rao Passi,
Consultant, Department of Pediatrics,
Choithram Hospital & Research Center,
Indore 452017,
India.
E-mail: gouripassi@hotmail.com