

## From the journals

### Epidemiology of filariasis in Matara

An epidemiological study of filariasis in three villages along the coast at Matara has shown a prevalence of microfilaraemia of 4.4% and a geometric mean microfilaraemia density of 20.6 microfilariae/60µl of fingerprick blood. These are higher than previous values for the area. Prevalence is lower in females compared to males, and also in males under 20 years compared to the older males. Clinical manifestations attributed to filariasis such as fever, elephantiasis and hydrocele were found in 9.5% of the people. Prevalence of elephantiasis was more common in females (4.2%) compared to males (1.4%). Aggregation of cases in households was seen for fever and elephantiasis. *Annals of Tropical Medicine and Parasitology* 2001; 95: 263-73. These results indicate that the disease is spreading and that filariasis is a greater public health problem than previously recognised.

### Cardiac effects of psychotropic drugs

Use of certain psychotropic drugs is associated with sudden death. Among the psychotropics, thioridazine has the greater risk of cardiac events. Tricyclics have effects on the heart rate, blood pressure and prolongation of the QTc interval. Lithium and carbamazepine are associated with SA nodal arrhythmias, and SSRIs, sodium valproate and the benzodiazepines are considered safer. In patients with high risk of cardiac complications (eg. the elderly, those with pre-existing cardiac disease, those taking concurrent medication with potential cardiac effects, poor metabolisers of drugs) the above information should be considered when selecting drugs. Regular monitoring of heart rate, blood pressure, and ECG is also recommended. *Annals, Academy of Medicine, Singapore* 2001; 30: 625-31.

### Abuse potential of diazepam and tramadol

Diazepam is widely used as an anxiolytic sedative, anaesthetic and anticonvulsant. It is cheap and widely used as the alternatives may be unavailable or unaffordable. However, epidemiological studies and surveys have shown that diazepam is abused more than any other benzodiazepine. Tramadol, which is an analgesic used for moderate to severe pain, has the potential to produce dependence of the morphine type and is also known to be abused. Convulsions have been reported after the first dose. Risk of convulsions is increased in those taking concomitant medication that may reduce seizure threshold such as certain tricyclics and SSRIs. *WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence; TRS 903*:p 12, 21, 23. These drugs are now widely available and prescribers should be aware of these potential problems.

### Percutaneous aortic valve replacement

Animal experiments are being presently performed for percutaneous implantation of the aortic and pulmonary valves. These experiments provide hope for use of these techniques in humans in the future. *Heart* 2001; 86: 705-6.

### Cardiac dysrhythmias with quinolones

Prescription event monitoring data have shown that use of fluoroquinolones, especially ciprofloxacin, is associated with cardiac dysrhythmias. Dysrhythmias could occur within 42 days of initiation of therapy and patients may have syncope or palpitations. *Drug Safety* 2001; 24: 1143-54. Prescribers should cultivate the habit of reporting adverse reactions to drugs. Reactions can be reported to the Department of Pharmacology, Faculty of Medicine, Colombo.

### Risk of myocardial infarction and relation to plasma lipids

Individuals with plasma lipid concentrations above set threshold values are believed to be at increased risk of coronary heart disease. These values are based on data from developed countries such as the UK and USA. People from poor countries tend to have lower lipid concentrations than those in the developed world and adoption of 'foreign' threshold values may exclude them from preventive therapy. A case control study from Algeria has shown that in Algerian men with myocardial infarction an increase in concentrations of total cholesterol (TC) and LDL cholesterol, and a decrease in HDL cholesterol were associated with an increased risk of myocardial infarction, but the lipid concentrations rarely reached the threshold values. When these results were compared with similar studies conducted in France and Ireland it was found that Algerian men had a TC of 5.2 mmol/l versus 5.8 mmol/l in France and 6.2 mmol/l in Ireland. However, the TC:HDL cholesterol ratio and the LDL:HDL ratio provided consistent and comparable estimates of cardiovascular risk across the three populations. The ratio was about 6 for patients with myocardial infarction whereas controls had a ratio of 5 or less. The authors question the validity of threshold values for cardiovascular risk prevention in populations with low plasma lipid concentrations. *Lancet* 2001; 358: 1064-1065. These findings will have relevance to Sri Lanka too.

**Management of constipation in children with disabilities**

Constipation is a common problem in children and it is particularly bad in those with disabilities (eg. cerebral palsy, meningomyelocele). Often there is a long delay (of months or years) in recognition of the problem. This delay is due either to acceptance of it as an inevitable consequence of the neurological impairment or other problems such as convulsions getting priority in management. Communication difficulties also compound the delay. Abdominal pain is a common complaint in those having chronic constipation. Proper treatment has to be based on a clear understanding of the pathogenesis of the condition. For example, constipation may be associated with no enlargement of the rectum or soiling or there can be enlargement of the rectum with or without soiling. Most children can be managed with dietary, medical or behavioural therapy. Adequate treatment of constipation improves the appetite and behaviour of these children. *Development Medicine and Child Neurology* 2001; 43: 829-32.

**R L Jayakody**, *Department of Pharmacology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo.*