

News In Brief

“The public mindset must change, from apathy and the belief that CPR is someone else’s duty, to one of shouldering the responsibility, not only for oneself, but also for the community.”

- Dr Balaji Sadasivan, Senior Minister of State for Health, and Guest-of-Honour at the 1st Asian Update in Resuscitation on 5 March 2006



THE HEART OF THE MATTER I

Bystander cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and the use of automated external defibrillators (AEDs) received nationwide attention at the 1st Asian Update in Resuscitation held at Changi General Hospital on 5 March 2006.

North America’s significant advances in pre-hospital training generated great interest. While a dismal one in five cardiac arrest victims in Singapore receive bystander CPR, the rate in Seattle exceeds 50%. In a local study of 1,000 such patients, only 5% survived. However, prompt CPR and use of AEDs can more than double the chances of survival.

Chicago’s O’Hare Airport and Las Vegas casinos feature easily accessible devices and trained employees who can get to victims within 90 seconds. Survival rates in Las Vegas are reportedly as high as 70%, while in more than half of the cases at O’Hare Airport, the AEDs were used successfully by people who had no prior training.

Currently, only the Singapore Sports Council, Police Academy, Singapore Island Country Club and Tanglin Club have AEDs on their premises. However, the Ministry of Health agrees with the idea of making these devices more widely available and equipping Singaporeans with the necessary skills in CPR and AED use.

America’s ex-president Bill Clinton went a step further by passing a Bill stipulating that

all federal buildings make defibrillators readily available.

Mr Patrick Lum, general marketing manager of Suntec City, said it best: “It would be a good idea to have [AEDs] around ... What would it cost the place? Slightly more than \$10,000 for about three? The lives of patrons saved are worth more than that, I’m sure.”

(Source: *The Straits Times*)

THE HEART OF THE MATTER II

Researchers at the Cleveland Clinic report that patients taking Crestor (rosuvastatin, considered the most potent of the cholesterol-lowering statins) can reverse the amount of artery-clogging plaque that causes heart attacks and strokes by dramatically lowering bad cholesterol while boosting good cholesterol. (Published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association, JAMA*.)

JAMA also published an article from Germany, where a study of more than 2000 patients with acute coronary syndrome found that those who underwent stenting did better when treated with a combination of Plavix (clopidogrel) and ReoPro (abciximab).

In the *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)*, researchers from Hamilton, Ontario, report that giving Arixtra (fondaparinux, a blood-thinning agent) to ST-segment elevation

myocardial infarction (STEMI) patients during stenting can reduce the risk of second heart attacks or death.

As for the not-so-good news, a Cleveland Clinic study shows that combining Plavix and aspirin to prevent first heart attacks in people who are at high risk is a poor idea. Not only does adding Plavix not boost the benefits of aspirin, the combo increases the risk of haemorrhage and death (although the overall risk remained low). (*Published in the NEJM.*)

(Source: CNN Health)

OTHER MEDICAL UPDATES

1. A team of Johns Hopkins researchers reports that potassium-sparing diuretics may cut the risk of Alzheimer's disease by almost 70%. The study, published in the *Archives of Neurology*, based the finding on a study of more than 3,200 people aged 65 or older.
2. Two Vitamin B studies report that
 - (a) using Vitamins B6 and B12 to lower blood levels of homocysteine does not prevent heart attacks (Heart Outcomes Project Evaluation, HOPE), and
 - (b) patients who took folic acid, B12 and B6 showed a trend toward an increased risk of heart attack (Norway). (*Both published in NEJM.*)
3. Dutch researchers tested the impact of air travel on 71 volunteers who underwent an eight-hour flight as well as an eight-hour stint at the movies on the ground. Results printed in *The Lancet* showed that it was not just immobilisation which increased the occurrence of deep vein thrombosis. Low-pressure and low-oxygen environments in the cabin may also be contributing to the problem.
4. Think twice the next time you reach for a Red Bull. High-octane energy drinks may be so high in caffeine that they exceed the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) limit set for tamer beverages like Coke or Pepsi. Since the caffeine level is not disclosed on the label, these drinks may pose a health hazard for people with hypertension, pregnant women or those who are prone to anxiety attacks.
5. Pfizer received approval in January to market the first inhaled insulin, Exubera. The powdered insulin, taken just before meals, is released into the mouth and lungs through an inhaler similar to the ones that asthma patients use. In studies of more than 2,500 adults with either Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes, the needle-free insulin was as effective as short-acting insulin shots in controlling blood sugar levels.
6. Sanofi-Aventis' new weight-loss drug, Rimonabant, is the first to target the endocannabinoid system responsible for 'the marijuana munchies'. Acomplia homes in on a network of cells in the brain, liver and fat tissue that regulates hunger by linking appetite to the body's reward and satisfaction response, reducing food cravings by deactivating cannabinoid receptors. In half a dozen clinical trials, the compound helped 6,000 patients lose up to 10% of their body weight over a year and maintain that loss for another year. It also improved patients' cholesterol profiles.
7. Merck's cervical cancer vaccine, Gardasil, has demonstrated positive results from a clinical trial in which 755 healthy, sexually active women were injected with the shots three times over six months and none developed precancerous growths after four years. The vaccine, which protects against four types of human papillomavirus (HPV), is being considered as part of the inoculation roster for children in the US but faces resistance from concerned religious and parent groups who fear it may encourage sex by promoting the idea that it is risk-free.
8. Researchers at Pfizer have developed the first in a new class of compounds that prevents the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) from entering and infecting healthy cells. While current medications thwart HIV at the end of its reproductive cycle, Miraviroc targets the beginning of the disease process. Now in the final stage of clinical trials, it could become a significant roadblock in preventing HIV infections from progressing to full-blown AIDS. ■

(Source: CNN Health)

(Source: Time Magazine)