

Global Update

News in Brief

Management

Learning curve: Mistakes happen. Everyday. In healthcare it sometimes may cost a patient his life. Often the pattern of mistakes is recurrent. Based on this premise, Britain has launched a system of recording errors in healthcare called the National Reporting and Learning System (NRLS), developed by the National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA). Data is extracted from existing local risk management systems and professionals can also anonymously report it online. At the national level the NPSA will overview, identify recurring patterns of medical errors and develop practical solutions applicable at the local level. Experience derived from the aviation industry shows that as reporting of errors increase, the number declines. The aim is to promote a "learning culture" in the medical fraternity. To err is human, to learn from it is sublime (*bmj.com* 28 February 2004).

Robotics

At arms length: Flexibot is the name of an unusual robot. It is a robotic arm without a body designed to help disabled people. It was recently unveiled in the UK's Staffordshire University's Center for Rehabilitation Robotics. By creating docking stations at key places around the house, the robot can flip flop from one station to another. It can help in daily chores like brushing, feeding, shaving and with a little improvement will help to cook a three course meal. Technology with power is the technology which empowers (*newscientist.com* 11 March 2004).

Transplant medicine

Eggciting news: For many women and girls who become infertile after cancer chemotherapy, there is now a ray of hope. Scientists at the Cornell University, USA took out a strip of ovarian tissue from a woman who underwent chemotherapy for breast cancer and froze it for 6 years. When they reimplanted it in her abdomen it started producing follicles again after a gap of 3 months. Some of the follicles were chosen for in vitro fertilization of which one developed into a 4 cell embryo. Though it finally did not result in a pregnancy, it is a big step forward in the maintenance of fertility in women battling cancer. The news is vital for children with cancers since it presages an era of prolonged preservation of ovarian tissue.

Leisure

True lies: It will soon become easier to lie about where you are, on the mobile phone. A Romanian software company has developed software to mimic false backgrounds such as traffic noise, dentists drill, a thunderstorm and even the sound of another phone ringing. The trick involves blending the outgoing voice audio with another looped audio track. Different backgrounds can be set for different phone numbers so that they automatically get activated when a particular person rings up. The software SoundCover developed by the company Simeda costs 14.95 Euros and can be downloaded from their website. (*newscientist.com* 5 March 2004).

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