

## *Global Update*

### **News in Brief**

**Mobile Woes:** The National Radiological Protection Board of UK release in January has urged parents to be cautious about mobile phone use by children. Radiation hazards are slow and cumulative. Often it is decades before humanity wakes up to the silent yet deadly damage. Though there is no unequivocal evidence, some studies suggest that prolonged exposure to mobile phone energy may affect cognitive functions, increase susceptibility to cancer, and damage DNA. Children are vulnerable. The board recommends that children be told to use text messages wherever possible and use handsets with low SAR (specific absorption ratios) (BMJ 15 January 2005; 330:109).

**The Tsunami:** So far more than 150,000 people have been confirmed dead, 525,000 injured and 1 million rendered homeless by the Tsunami waves that struck the countries bordering the Indian Ocean on 26 December 2004. Although the major impact was felt by India, Indonesia, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka, several other countries have been affected: Bangladesh, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand in Asia; and Kenya, Somalia, and Tanzania in Africa. Slowly relief operations are giving way to rehabilitation programs. So far no major epidemic has been documented. India had initially declined all foreign aid but has now allowed the UNICEF to mount a campaign in Andaman and Nicobar Islands against measles and blindness. Within days of the Tsunami tragedy doctors and paramedics from the various IMA branches in and around Tamil Nadu had been mobilized and rushed in to help. The injured were treated free of cost in various

medical colleges and private hospitals. The major task of rebuilding lives stretches ahead (The Lancet 22 Jan 2005, BMJ 8 Jan 2005).

### **Vaccine Watch**

**The new rota virus vaccine:** Glaxo Smith Kline's new rota virus vaccine has been launched in Mexico on January 8, 2005. Rotarix is different from Wyeth's RotaShield which was launched in USA in 1998 and withdrawn in 1999 due to increased cases of intussusception. There are around 440,000 deaths due to rotavirus annually worldwide and many companies are working on the rotavirus vaccine such as Merck's RotaTeq which is awaiting US FDA approval. Having burnt our fingers earlier, careful post marketing surveillance is vital to avert iatrogenic disasters (The Lancet 15 January 2005).

**Testing Times:** A scientist in Greece has developed a new test for ADHD. Children are asked to wear goggles and follow a moving light on a computer screen. Tracking their eye movements help to differentiate ADHD children from normal children. The diagnosis was based on the abilities of the children to focus on the light stimulus, saccades and smooth pursuit. The test has an accuracy of 93.1%. It may have an added advantage of monitoring or predicting success with methylphenidate or other drug therapy. This 10 minute test may be a useful addition to make the diagnosis of ADHD more objective (New Scientist 22 January 2005).

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