

## *Global Update*

### **News in Brief**

#### **Disease Watch**

First case of sleeping sickness in India: A 39 year old milkman from Chandrapur in Maharashtra was admitted in Government Medical College, Nagpur with complaints of fever, headaches, extreme fatigue and lymphadenopathy. Detailed tests in National Laboratories finally confirmed the diagnosis of trypanosomiasis. The milkman who also worked as a veterinarian part time probably contracted it from an animal. WHO officials have rushed down from Paris to Nagpur to investigate the case. The New Year rings in a new disease ( The Economic Times 15 December 2004).

#### **Drug Watch**

New antitubercular drug: Researchers from Belgium have published reports of a promising antitubercular drug, Compound J, in a recent December issue of Science. It works by inhibiting the bacterial ATP synthase. Its new mechanism of action means drug resistance will be low. It's bio-availability in lung parenchyma is high and does not interact with other antiretrovirals. Other key features include the fact that it attacks non-replicating bacilli. Initial human trials are underway and it will be a couple of years before it hits the markets (Nature 9 December 2004).

#### **Economics**

Food for thought: A fascinating report in

the issue of the Lancet, presents the economists viewpoint of the obesity epidemic. Preventive health approaches to reduce obesity in the community have included education, skills training, and building social support to help people to change behavior. But have largely failed. In the US over the last few decades food has become cheaper especially foods which are rich in sugar and fat. In contrast healthy foods like fruits and vegetables are costly and unaffordable. So in the US obesity is a problem of the poor. In public health all that is considered is health and blame individuals for bad health choices. But human beings decide their actions not just on what is most good for their health. Economists view human behaviour as an attempt to derive maximum pleasure given the constraints of their circumstances, money and time. While public health experts try to change behaviour with education, economists feel the simplest way to change behaviour is by changing costs. Making cigarettes costly will automatically restrict their use. Another way is to increase the insurance premiums for obese individuals. All this sharply contrasts with the situation in India where the obesity epidemic is a problem of the rich, and perhaps fresh economic insights are needed (The Lancet 18 December 2004).

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