

Global Update

News in Brief

Bombay blues

Dry statistics cannot measure the extent of loss and calamity in Mumbai and Thane districts after the deluge since 26 July this year. Officially 6311 people have been admitted with complaints of fever in these two districts and death toll due to leptospirosis and water borne diseases has reached 233 as of 15 August. Mumbai alone accounted for 128 deaths. Samples tested so far in sick patients have revealed 60% to be due to leptospirosis. Teams from Delhi's National Institute of Communicable diseases, WHO's regional referral center and ICMR have also arrived for additional help. Soon the UNICEF's personnel will also be joining BMC in their door-to-door campaign to check for symptomatic people. Voluntary organizations like the Indian Red Cross have appealed to pharma companies to contribute. Ranbaxy and Pfizer have taken the initiative to provide free doxycycline as prophylaxis for leptospirosis (The Economic Times 16 August 2005, The Economic Times 15 August 2005).

Healing burns

Recovery from burns is a long and painful period. Scientists from Switzerland have experimented with an intuitively appealing therapy. Fetal cells from 14-week abortus were allowed to grow in a laboratory and then seeded onto a collagen mesh. The mesh was used in 8 children with burns ranging from 14

months to 9 years. Significant healing was recorded in 15 days. The results published in The Lancet are encouraging. The great advantages of this technique are considered to be lack of need of a graft, much more perfect new skin and the speed of recovery (Hohlfeld, *et al.* Lancet, Published online doi: 10. 1016/S0140-6736(05)67107-3 (2005), news@nature.com 18 August 2005).

Milking bacteria

Who ever heard of esoteric molecules called lantibiotics and polyketides? In the search for salvation from multi-drug resistant bacteria, scientists are experimenting with novel ways to develop new molecules. So far new molecules were developed by playing with the natural defences of bacteria and fungi. Now they are trying to genetically engineer bacteria to pump out these new molecules. Daniel Santi and colleagues from California have recently succeeded to some extent to produce these polyketides and their complicated genetic experiments were recently published in Nature Biotechnology. If we realize how tough it is to develop a new molecule perhaps it will spur us not to use them so casually. (Menzella, *et al.* Nature Biotech, Advanced Online Publication, doi: 10.1038/nbt128, 2005).

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