

DESTINY'S CHILD

How much and when should we tamper with what nature bequeaths us? This recurring question which haunts all students of science sometime in their life and career is open once more. Nikita and Harish Mehta have been in the news since they petitioned the court for permission to abort the 25 week old fetus Nikita was carrying. The fetus was found to have a congenital heart block and possibly a corrected transposition of great arteries. They considered the financial burden of a pacemaker which may need to be repeated at a later date beyond their means. India's 37 year old abortion law rules that though abortion is legal up to 12 weeks, between 12 to 20 weeks it may be permitted only if the health of the mother or fetus is at risk. On Monday, August 4, the Bombay High Court denied the petition stating that they could not make an exception in the case and that nothing in the report of the expert committee they had instituted suggested that the child's life was at risk (*The Times of India* 5 August 2008).

OF CHLOROQUINE AND CIPROFLOXACIN

In a remote village in the rain forests of Guyana, an amazing observation has been made. Over a three year period, scientists monitored the levels of resistance to ciprofloxacin in the *E. coli* isolated from the guts of these villagers. In February 2003, the resistance rates were 3 times higher than it was 1 year prior. The jump corresponded to the increased use of chloroquine after a large outbreak of malaria in late 2002. Chloroquine was being taken by the villagers almost daily. It is interesting to note that quinolones were created in the 1960's based on byproducts of chloroquine synthesis. The researchers have now proved that chloroquine levels as seen in the human intestinal tract can induce ciprofloxacin resistance in *E. Coli*. So far,

drugs used against viruses and parasites were not considered in the hit list of drugs implicated in the world wide menace of antibiotic resistance. But this study has forced people to realize that rampant antimalarial use may also play a role. The world is interconnected so deeply that man's excesses always show (*Scientific American* 21 July 2008).

QUADRIVALENT VACCINE AGAINST DENGUE

A new vaccine against dengue has evoked much interest. This was developed in Maryland and South Carolina. It has antigens from all four dengue virus types as well as an adenoviral agent. Intra muscular injection in rhesus macaques evoked neutralizing antibodies against all four dengue viral types. To test it further, live viral challenges were done at 4 and 24 weeks. Results showed that the vaccine afforded complete protection against type 1 and 3 and significant protection against type 2 and 4. If one considers that more than 100 million people suffer annually from dengue worldwide, this vaccine is much awaited and long overdue (*Science Daily* July 23 2008).

NEW VACCINE FOR TUBERCULOSIS

In the XVII International AIDS Conference held in Mexico City in early August, Aeras Global, a TB vaccine foundation announced that a new vaccine against tuberculosis may be available in the next 7 years if ongoing trials prove to be successful. The strategy with the new vaccine would include one dose at birth, a booster at 14 weeks and a second in adolescence. Other possibilities include an oral and a nasal spray. The old vaccine is 80 years old and the problem of tuberculosis seems bigger than before (www.jamaicaobserver.com, 4 August 2008).

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