

Global Update

News in Brief

Sociology

Goodbye girls: There are only 745 girls for every 1000 boys in Fatehgarh district of Punjab. And the story is not much different in the rest of India. Will girls become an endangered species in India? The new report "Missing" by the United Nations Development Fund released in October certainly thinks so. While India's population rose 21% between 1991 and 2001, the sex ratio plummeted from 945 girls / 1000 boys to 927 in 2001. This ratio has been regularly heading south from 976 in 1961 to 964 in 1971 and to 962 in 1981. Punjab, Haryana, Himachal and Gujarat have the dubious distinction of having fewer than 800 girls / 1000 boys. The widespread availability of the ultrasound in remote corners of the country, coupled with the indecent craving for a boy are the chief culprits according to Mira Shiva of the Voluntary Health Organization of India. Others like Dr Puneet Bedi, independent health activist and gynecologist lay the blame squarely on 100% complicity by the medical community in this "criminal activity" indulged in by parents of the unborn child (eBMJ 1 November 2003, <http://www.unfpa.org.in/>).

Economics

Experiments with truth: Does the medical journal have an important role as watch-dog to monitor quality of medical practice and information doled out by pharma companies? The Lancet recently published a blistering attack against the new cholesterol lowering drug rosuvastatin in its editorial. The editor Dr Horton minced no words in describing the efficacy trials of the drug as "weak data", "adventurous statistics" and "marketing dressed up as research". Rosuvastatin is doing commercially better than expected and is in direct competition with atorvastatin "Lipitor" a best selling drug from Pfizer. Meanwhile the Cochrane Collaboration also failed to make a concrete decision about drug company sponsorship for their work in its annual conference in Barcelona. The Collaboration produces systematic reviews about evidence of health care interventions. Since it is a truth well established that sponsored research has favorable outcomes, many feel that the integrity of the Cochrane reviews will come under a cloud if they also receive pharma company funds (eBMJ 1 November, 8 November 2003).

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