

Global Update

News in Brief

Technology

Cell Bank: After cell phones we now enter the era of cell banks. The first stem cell bank in the world is being opened in Britain under the chairmanship of Lord Naren Patel - an obstetrician who is now a member of the Science and Technology Committee of the House of Lords. The bank will accept stem cell lines approved by its steering committee grow them and provide them to researchers when required. Its major role will be to provide strict quality control. Stem cells are special because they can multiply and survive infinitely given appropriate conditions. For many degenerative disorders if we learn how to utilize them, stem cells may be the only answer (bmj.com 29 May 2004, BMJ 2004; 328:1277).

Mission with machines: An interesting experiment was recently underway in two contrasting states of India - Karnataka and Orissa. Can we improve the health of our people in the remotest villages by upgrading information and communication technology? HIN India (Health InterNetwork India) is a pilot project coordinated by WHO. Its aim was to provide connectivity (computers and internet access), content (relevant, high quality information), capacity building (skills to use information technology) and policy (leadership role in introducing change). HIN India introduced ICT into seven primary health centres and three community health centres and upgraded computers, internet connection, and networks in four research institutes and two medical colleges. It also tested applications such as e-fax (faxing direct from computers), e-consultations, geographic

information systems, and handheld computers in these settings. There were many lessons to be learnt including the fact that basic infrastructure is critical for any development. Computers without electricity and internet connections without functional telephone lines are the ground realities which we need to transcend. <http://www.hin.org.in/>, BMJ 2004; 328: 1193-1196 (www.bmj.com 15 May).

Travel

East meets West: For years, Indians with money would go to Western countries for advanced medical therapy. We are now witnessing a complete turnaround. Indian tertiary care hospitals are now seeing patients from Britain, Canada, and USA come for treatments ranging from cardiac bypass, hip resurfacing and dental treatment. Maharashtra has set up a Council for Medical Tourism and the Confederation of Indian Industry and the world famous management consultants McKinsey have reported that health tourism in India could generate upto \$ 2 billion by 2012. A cardiac bypass in India plus air travel costs around \$6000, compared with \$23 000 in a private hospital in Britain or \$30 000 in the United States. Low costs and the easy command of English by Indian doctors are the main attractions. Meanwhile sociologists are amazed that the government should promote medical tourism when the majority of the country's population struggles for basic health care facilities. BMJ 2004; 328: 1338 (www.bmj.com 5 June 2004).

Fraud

True Lies: Is truth to be sacrificed at the altar of big business? Is information being manipulated to suit the interests of gigantic multinational companies? Glaxo SmithKline

is facing trial in the United States for allegedly hiding negative reports of trials involving the antidepressant Paroxetine used in adolescents. Five trials are being highlighted of which 2 showed no efficacy of the drug and 3 showed an increase in suicidal ideation. Damaging internal memos of the company which have been found, say that it was “commercially unacceptable” to admit that paroxetine did not work in children and it would have to “effectively manage the dissemination of these data in order to minimise any potential

negative impact”. A national trials registry which records all trials at onset in the USA is one possible solution against future fraud. *BMJ* 2004; 328: 1395 (www.bmj.com 12 June).

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Pedscapes

Indian medlars centre - <http://www.medind.nic.in> This website provides a single window web access to medical journals published in India. Full text of over twenty Indian journals including, Indian Pediatrics, Indian Journal of Medical and Pediatric Oncology, Indian Journal of Tuberculosis, National Tuberculosis Institute bulletin and Journal of Indian Association of Pediatric Surgeons are available online. The website also provides a search facility, whereby one can search for articles using keywords. This website has been hosted by the Bibliographic Informatics Division (<http://indmed.nic.in/>) of the National Informatics Centre (<http://home.nic.in>). As the journals are hosted in the Indian server, access is very fast. This site can be used as an alternate for online access to Indian Pediatrics as the latest issues are mirrored in this site.

Indian Council of Medical Research - <http://icmr.nic.in> The website of ICMR has been revamped and provides information about training programs, seminars, symposia, workshops, courses and conferences, ongoing and completed projects, fellowships and jobs. Links to websites of the various institutions under the ICMR have also been provided. Full text of many publications of the ICMR including the Indian Journal of Medical Research are also available online. The Bioinformatics section (<http://icmr.nic.in/bic/>) of the website is a new addition. This section contains news on bioinformatics and also a database of medical freeware.

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