

INDIA LEADS IN MEASLES MORTALITY

Measly performance in vaccine coverage meant that 47% of measles mortality in the world in 2010 occurred in India. Even Africa came second accounting for 36% of mortality. This data was published in the lancet based on a model constructed using population, immunization coverage, surveillance data, and country specific mortality rates. In 2001, all member states of the WHO agreed to a target of reducing measles mortality by 90 percent by 2010 compared with year 2000. Compared to this the actual reduction by 74% is not bad. However India's contribution was just a 26% reduction. In sharp contrast Africa recorded a drop of 85%. Hence the burning need to introduce a second dose of the measles vaccine. The new Strategic plan aims to cut global measles deaths by at least 95% by 2015. It also plans to eliminate measles and rubella in at least five WHO regions by 2020 (<http://www.unfoundation.org/news>; *The Lancet*, 24 April 2012; *The Hindu* 24 April 2012).

BOND FOR US BOUND DOCTORS

This year onwards any doctor going to the US for higher studies will compulsorily sign a bond promising to return after completion of studies. This was announced by Union Health and Family Welfare Minister, Ghulam Nabhi Azad. He also mentioned that in the past 3 years 3000 doctors left for the US and failed to return. Mr Azad also favors increasing the MBBS duration to 6.5 years with a compulsory 1 year rural practice linked to the Rural Health Mission. The governments take on this emotive issue is that huge sums of money are spent on each student who studies in a government medical college and there has to be a payback time. A study from the Department of Hospital Administration, AIIMS found that it takes Rs 1.7 crore to produce one doctor. The conflict is between what the country does for us and what we are willing to do for the country (*The Times of India* 24 April 2012, *The Hindu* 23 April 2012).

NEW ANTIMALARIAL FROM RANBAXY

India pharma giant, Ranbaxy has just launched 'Synriam' as the country's first domestically developed antimalarial. It's a combination of arterolane maleate, a short acting molecule and piperazine phosphate a long

acting one. Piperazine has been known since the 1960's but Arterolane was discovered by a collaborative drug discovery project funded by the Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV), a Swiss charity led by Jonathan Vennerstrom. It is considered to have one of the funkier known chemical structures. MMV partnered with Ranbaxy to carry the development through to the clinic. However, after MMV reviewed clinical trial data it backed out from developing the drug. Ranbaxy was then granted a worldwide, royalty-free license for this compound at no cost. In clinical trials, Ranbaxy reported a cure rate of 95% when three tablets were taken over the course of three days at a total cost of Rs 130/-. Artemesin is produced from plant sources and hence is expensive while arterolane can be chemically synthesized and consequently cheaper. It is intended for treatment of uncomplicated falciparum malaria (<http://www.rsc.org/chemistryworld/News/2012/May/ranbaxy-synriam-anti-malarial-mmv-india.asp>, *The Hindu* 26 April 2012).

HARVARD TAKES ON ELSEVIER

Even Harvard Library, one of the world's wealthiest institutes has reached the end of its tether. It has released a memo to its 2100 teaching and research staff. The memo from Harvard's faculty advisory council has declared that price hikes from publishing giants like Elsevier, Springer and Wiley have made scholarly communication "fiscally unsustainable" and "academically restrictive" while drawing profits of 35% or more. Prices for online access by 2 major publishers have increased 145% in 6 years. It seems paradoxical that faculty do the research, write the papers, referee, serve on editorial boards, all for free and then buy back the results of their labor at outrageous prices. The memo has asked professional organizations to take control of scholarly publishing and consider submitting their work to open access journals and resign from editorial boards of journals that are not open access. In the UK, 30 libraries negotiated and struck a deal with Elsevier and Wiley to save themselves GBP 20 m. Will the meek inherit the earth? (*The Hindu* 26 April 2012)

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