



Getty Images

While this Afghani man brightens up his neighbourhood in Kabul by selling balloons, the combination of poverty and conflict has cast a shadow on the mental health of many Afghanis. Rates of depression and anxiety are high, and mental health training is poor. World Health Organization figures suggest that there is only a handful of psychiatrists in the country.

From the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care

Preventing medication errors by using Tall Man lettering

The drug names Dilaudid and Dilantin sound alike and look alike. This is a major reason why the potential for confusion of these two drugs was given a severity rating of catastrophic by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC) as part of its national Tall Man lettering project.

About 2%–3% of all hospital admissions are medication-related, and around half of these are preventable¹ — many are the result of drug name confusion.² The monetary cost of these mix-ups is significant, estimated at \$660 million in 2008 for medicine-related hospital admissions.¹

Tall Man lettering uses selective capitalisation (eg, dilaUDID and dilaNTIN) to help distinguish, and so reduce confusion, between similar-looking drug names. This low-cost intervention helps health professionals to select the right product in electronic systems or from shelves.

In the first project of its kind in the world, the ACSQHC has developed

nationally consistent Tall Man lettering to reduce the risk of patient harm resulting from sound-alike or look-alike drug names.

The project considered 250 name pairs using a risk matrix based on the likelihood of confusion and the potential severity of the consequences of any confusion. The pairs were then assigned one of five severity levels, ranging from minimum to catastrophic. Tall Man formatting was then instituted for the highest priority drug pair names identified from the risk matrix, and these were then tested for human factors using 65 clinicians. To ensure that the list remains current, the ACSQHC will develop a register to enable clinicians to notify the Commission of drug name pairs or groups for which they believe Tall Man lettering may reduce incidents and increase safety.

The National Tall Man Lettering List can be used in electronic medication management systems, hospital pharmacies and wherever health professionals select drugs. It will be incorporated into the National

e-Health Transition Authority's Australian Medicines Terminology and other e-health initiatives. This development is part of the ACSQHC's Medication Safety Program to reduce the incidence of adverse medicine events, within which safe labelling plays a vital part.

The ACSQHC considers Tall Man lettering as just one part of the multifaceted approach required to reduce patient harm caused by drug name confusion — more rigorous pre-market testing and barcode verification are also needed to reduce the risks.

The National Tall Man Lettering List and a full report on the project to develop Australia's national Tall Man lettering is available from the ACSQHC website at http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/internet/safety/publishing.nsf/Content/PriorityProgram-06_NTMS.

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¹ Roughead EE, Semple S. Literature review: medication safety in acute care in Australia. Sydney: Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, 2008.

² Phatak HM, Cady PS, Heyneman CA, Culbertson VL. Retrospective detection of potential medication errors involving drugs with similar names. *J Am Pharm Assoc* 2005; 45: 616–624.

News

Malaria vaccine within 3 years

Despite reductions in mortality and morbidity, malaria continues to affect about 225 million people worldwide annually. More than 780 000 children die from the mosquito-borne disease each year, mostly African children.

But interim results of a randomised trial show that soon infants could be vaccinated against malaria, along with their other routine vaccinations.

Last month researchers reported results on the first 6000 children aged from 5 to 17 months in the Phase 3 trial which is being conducted in seven African countries. Among those randomly assigned to receive the RTS,S/AS01 vaccine, the incidence of first episode of clinical malaria was 0.32 per person-year, compared with an incidence of 0.55 per person-year in the control group, for an efficacy of 50.4%.

Serious adverse events occurred at a similar rate within the two groups.

The efficacy results in infants aged 6 to 12 weeks will not be reported for another year.

Professor Nicholas White from the faculty of tropical medicine at Mahidol University in Bangkok, Thailand, said that, barring unforeseen disasters, "the malaria vaccine should become available in just over 3 years".

The World Health Organization has indicated that it could recommend the vaccine in some African countries as early as 2015.

"It is becoming increasingly clear that we really do have the first effective vaccine against a parasitic disease in humans", Professor White said.

N Engl J Med 2011; 18 October (online)

Updated anaphylaxis advice online

Anaphylaxis recognition and management advice has recently been updated and is available for free online. The standardised consensus modules were prepared by the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy in association with various health and education departments and medical colleges. They can be found online at <http://www.allergy.org.au>

From the MJA archives

MJA 1978; 4 November

Some medical aspects of obesity

Many studies have shown abnormal responses to psychological questioning [among obese people]: anxiety states, depression, a lower than average intelligence are common findings. The person retains an image of fatness, and may become emotionally disturbed when weight loss becomes substantial. Weight loss, therefore, tends to be limited during any period of weight reduction, and it is unusual for more than 12 kg of weight to be lost at one time. Recent studies of the psychology of overweight people cast doubt on the belief that neuroticism and disturbed



behaviour precede weight gain, but rather believe that emotional changes follow the frustrations of being fat.

Hendra virus vaccine hope

A human monoclonal antibody has been found to prevent monkeys dying from Hendra virus (HeV) in a study that brings scientists a step closer to finding a way to protect humans from the virus.

The potent HeV-neutralising human monoclonal antibody reduced the number of viral particles in the brain and lungs of a group of monkeys treated 3 days after they were infected with HeV. The treated animals survived, recovering 2 weeks after infection, whereas the untreated monkeys died a week after infection.

"We believe that the results are highly relevant to the potential post-exposure treatment of human cases", the researchers said.

Sci Transl Med 2011; 19 October (online)

Teen shift work linked to MS

Shift work at a young age is associated with an increased risk of multiple sclerosis (MS), possibly due to disruptions in circadian rhythms and sleep patterns, according to Swedish researchers. Disturbed melatonin secretion and enhanced proinflammatory responses as a result of sleep disruption could play a role. The study found that people who had worked shifts for 3 years or longer while aged less than 20 years had a twofold risk of developing MS compared with those who had not worked shifts. Shift work was defined as work between the hours of 9 pm and 7 am. The authors said early exposure to several lifestyle/environmental factors, such as Epstein-Barr virus infection and obesity, seemed to increase the risk of MS.

Ann Neurol 2011; 12 October (online)

Call to protect Bahraini doctors

The World Medical Association has appealed to the King of Bahrain for a fair retrial for doctors and other health professionals who face long jail sentences for treating people during the recent civil unrest. The Australian Medical Association (AMA) signed the letter sent to the King, which also called on the leader to reinstate the elected leadership of the Bahrain Medical Association. AMA president Dr Steve Hambleton said putting the doctors on trial for fulfilling their ethical duty to care for others was "a threat to the universal right to health and health care".

<http://www.wma.net>

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