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News & Notes, June 2007

Painless Diabetes Monitoring

A team of researchers from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University has developed a noninvasive glucose-monitoring system that they hope will be commercially available within a year. The device uses near-infrared wavelengths to detect the presence of glucose in the blood; measurements are displayed in about 10 seconds. Multiple clinical trials have revealed an accuracy rating of 85% or higher. The system earned a gold medal at this year's International Exhibition of Inventions, New Techniques, and Products in Geneva.

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Cracking Down on Retail Health

The Illinois State Medical Society is backing the "Retail Health Care Facility Permit Act" (HB 1885), which will grant the state's Department of Public Health the right to regulate health care services provided in a retail store or pharmacy. Among the bill's provisions is that services must be provided "in accordance with a limited scope of services" and that "a licensed physician must be available to admit patients to a local licensed hospital" if needed. While the medical society insists they are concerned about patient safety, independent analysts (and PAs and NPs, perhaps) suspect that doctors see retail health clinics as "a very big competitive threat." According to the *Chicago Tribune*, the Illinois group plans to lobby for similar federal legislation at the American Medical Association's annual meeting.

Death Does Not Stop Obesity Complications

In Britain, the impact of the ubiquitous obesity epidemic has expanded into the postmortem realm. Representatives of the Local Government Association (LGA) say that crematoria are being forced to build larger furnaces to accommodate wider coffins (standard caskets range in width from 16 to 20 inches, but some deceased persons require as much as 40 inches). Also, some families find that their departed loved ones have to be transferred to another facility if the local crematorium's furnace is too narrow. "This is just another demonstration of how the UK's obesity problem is putting a real strain on public services," the LGA's Hazel Harding said in a press release.

"On Call" Pays for Some

The *Boston Globe* recently reported that more hospitals in Massachusetts are starting to pay surgeons and other specialists who provide "on call" services to emergency departments. Clinicians can earn up to \$1,000 per shift. While this is a departure from tradition (since "on call" duties are more often exchanged for admitting privileges or provided out of a sense of responsibility), the American Hospital Association indicates that more than a third of US hospitals now offer monetary incentives to surgeons and specialists for these services.

Food Pyramid Focuses on Latinos

The Latino Nutrition Coalition has released *Camino Magico* (Magic Road), a 16-page document that includes a Latin American Diet Pyramid (www.latinonutrition.org/LatinPyramid.html). The pyramid "represents a healthy, traditional Latin American diet" and "is not based solely on either the weight or the percentage of energy (calories) that foods account for in the diet, but on a blend of these." Dietary components fall into frequency categories such as *weekly*, *daily*, and *at every meal*. The organization says their pyramid offers "refinements" to the US Department of Agriculture's version and is based on current research and cultural understanding.

Sun Safety Varies by Locale

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Which US cities are the most "sun smart"? According to a survey by the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD), citizens of Washington, DC, New York City, Miami, Tampa, and Los Angeles are the most knowledgeable about sun protection and the risks posed by exposure to ultraviolet light. Residents of Chicago ranked lowest among the 32 cities sampled. Participants were asked to agree or disagree with statements such as "Getting a base tan is a healthy way to protect skin from sun damage"; overall, 35% of the American public scored in the "above average" range. "The bottom line is that everyone needs to be concerned about protecting themselves from skin cancer, no matter where [they] live," AAD President Diane R. Baker, MD, reminded consumers and clinicians in a statement.

Work Is Hazardous to Your Health

Pundits and office jokesters may wonder whether working can make you sick, but there is evidence that your job can be hazardous to your health. The World Health Organization recently announced that at least 200,000 people die from workplace-related cancer each year; millions of workers are at risk for lung cancer, mesothelioma, and leukemia from exposure to asbestos, tobacco smoke, or benzene in the workplace. Most cancer deaths caused by occupational risk factors occur in the developed world. In slightly lighter news, Norwegian researchers say at least some women appear to experience work-related migraine. Eighty-four patients provided data on every attack they had for 12 consecutive months; analysis revealed that significantly fewer attacks occurred on Sunday or a holiday than on other days of the week. Writing in *Cephalalgia*, Alstadhaug et al suggest "days off protect against migraine"--a conclusion that may please workers, but not their employers!

Vol. No: 17:6 Issue: 6/15/2007