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Leucocyte count may predict heart disease in women

A new study indicates that a high white blood cell count is an independent predictor of cardiovascular events and of mortality from all causes in postmenopausal women.

The research, published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* (2005;165:500-8), showed that a leucocyte count greater than 6.7×10^9 cells/l may identify postmenopausal women at high risk of disease who are not currently identified by traditional cardiovascular risk factors.

The risk of death from coronary heart disease among women in the group with the highest leucocyte counts was more than twice that among women in the lowest group. Women in the highest group also had a significantly higher risk of non-fatal myocardial infarction, stroke, and total mortality. "We can mostly account for cardiovascular disease by the known risk factors," said Dr Karen Margolis, the principal investigator, who is associate professor of medicine at the University of Minnesota.

"The white blood cell count comes out at least as strong a predictor of coronary heart disease as the C reactive protein," said Dr Margolis. "In any situation in which you might consider testing C reactive protein to further evaluate cardiovascular risk, then the white blood cell count could be considered as an alternative."

Barbara Kermod-Scott *Calgary*

US campaigners challenge abortion law changes

In the latest battle in the United States over abortion, organisations campaigning on reproductive and civil rights have challenged a new state law in Michigan that could ban all abortions. They have also challenged attempts by attorneys general in Kansas and Indiana to obtain confidential medical records.



Cosmetic surgeons aim for the perfect facelift

Exactly what does the perfect eyebrow look like? Should it be 2.4 cm from the middle of the pupil of the eye? Should the apex of the eyebrow lie vertically above the lateral limbus? Should the ends of the eyebrow lie on the same horizontal level?

According to a new report for plastic surgeons working in the burgeoning area of facelifts, a "one shape fits all" approach to eyebrows should be frowned on. When positioning and shaping the brow, surgeons need to take into account the aesthetic relation between brow shape and position on the face, says the report (*Facial Plastic Surgery* 2004;20:193-8).

It makes a number of recommendations for different face shapes. The long face (Claudia Schiffer) needs a flat brow to make it appear more oval. In the square face (Demi Moore) strong angled eyebrows will balance a strong jaw line. In the diamond face (Sophia Loren, above) a rounded brow softens its angularity. The report cautions that the wrong choice can be disastrous. An angulated, highly arched brow can, it says, help make a round face appear more oval, but a round brow will turn the same face into a beach ball.

Roger Dobson *Abergavenny*

The organisations have gained a court injunction to temporarily prevent the enforcement of a Michigan state law that could make it more difficult for women there to have an abortion. The new law, which was to go into effect on 30 March, would redefine the moment of birth as the time when any part of the fetus was outside the vagina and showed signs of life. The rights organisations say it might make it illegal to use abortion techniques such as suction or dilatation and extraction to treat women with a pre-viable fetus.

Meanwhile, in Kansas and Indiana the issue at stake is the confidentiality of medical records of women who seek abortions or reproductive advice. The Kansas attorney general, Phill Kline, demanded

records of about 90 women and girls from two Kansas clinics, looking for records of women who had abortions after the state's legal limit of 22 weeks and of girls aged under 16 who had sought medical care for pregnancy, in a search for suspected cases of child abuse.

Janice Hopkins Tanne *New York*

Israel tightens up hospital research procedures

Israel's health ministry is to issue new directives for closer scrutiny of studies on patients. The move comes after newspaper publicity about several alleged irregularities in clinical research.

Every hospital will have to appoint a "follow-up body,"

comprising three members and headed by the institution's internal financial controller or legal adviser. This independent supervisory body will periodically report on its activities to hospital management and to the hospital's Helsinki committee, which is responsible for approving clinical research projects at present.

Researchers will have to present reports on their work at least twice a year to the hospital's Helsinki committee (compared with once a year or less frequently under the old system), and if the potential risk to patients in the study is significant they will have to report more often.

Two months before each study is due to be completed, the new follow-up body will remind the researchers to present a report on their progress or a summary of their study.

Judy Siegel-Itzkovich *Jerusalem*

German scientists demand a ban on tobacco additives

The German Cancer Research Centre (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum) last week demanded that certain additives used in tobacco products be banned because they increase the risk of cancer and tobacco addiction, particularly among children and young adults.

Experts from the centre, in Heidelberg, and from the Institute for Law and Economy in Hamburg presented two new publications that analysed internal tobacco industry documents concerning the composition of tobacco products and additives.

They told a press conference in Berlin that the documents showed how the tobacco industry added certain substances to cigarettes to make them more palatable to children and young people. Menthol, for example, was added to most cigarettes (not just to those described as mentholated) because inhaling menthol has an anaesthetic effect, allowing first time smokers, who were often children, to take deep puffs.

Sugar and aromatics were also added to make cigarettes taste better.

Wolfgang Heiner, director of