

Recent Health Concerns

New method to cut depression in young adults

(IANS) / 12 February 2013 - Washington - Computerized avatars can help young adults who are reluctant to seek therapy for mental health problems because of the stigma and inadequate insurance coverage. A preliminary study by researchers at Case Western Reserve University suggests that depression levels may be significantly lowered when 18- to 25-year-olds interact with computerized avatars of healthcare providers. Such avatars are virtual 3D images of a nurse practitioner or physician as a way to rehearse office visits ahead of time and learn self-management skills, the journal *Applied Nursing Research* reports.

Melissa Pinto, clinical research scholar at Case Western Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing, says the study was the first to her knowledge. Pinto used a Case Western-designed virtual programme, called eSMART-MH, adapted from a previous platform (eSMART-HD) designed by the team to help adults with chronic health problems manage their health, according to a Case Western statement.

eSMART-MH walks young adults through healthcare appointments with an avatar healthcare provider in virtual primary care office setting. During these visits, young adults practice talking about depression, ask avatar healthcare providers questions and learn self-managements skills to help manage depressive symptoms.

Diet fizzy drinks come with higher diabetes risk

(IANS) / 11 February 2013 - Diet fizzy drinks, touted as healthier substitutes are likely to push up diabetes risk by 60 percent, rather than the regular versions, says a European study involving more than 66,000 women.

Diet drinkers also consume more or an average of 2.8 glasses a week which compounds the effect, as compared to 1.6 for regular drinkers. Regular, full-fat versions have previously been suspected of causing diabetes.

More than 66,000 middle-aged French women were quizzed about their dietary habits. Their health was then

monitored over 14 years from 1993 to 2007, the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition reports.

The researchers, from the National Institute of Health and Medical Research in France, examined the rates of diabetes among women who drank either regular or diet fizzy drinks and those who drank only unsweetened fruit juice, according to the Daily Mail.

Those who drank up to 359 ml of any type of fizzy a week - just more than a regular-sized can - were a third more likely to develop the disease. The risk was more than double in those who drank 600 ml a week - just bigger than a regular bottle.

Drinkers of diet drinks had an even higher risk of diabetes compared to those who drank regular ones. Those who drank up to 500 ml a week had a 15 percent increased risk.

Once more than 1.5 litres a week was consumed, this became a 60 percent increased risk.

Green tea deterrent against Alzheimer's Disease

(IANS) / 10 February 2013 - Green tea contains certain chemicals which could hinder the progress of Alzheimer's disease that afflict a growing number of aged people, says new research.

In early-stage laboratory experiments, the researchers from the University of Leeds identified the process which allows harmful clumps of protein to latch on to brain cells, causing them to die.

They were able to interrupt this pathway using the purified extracts of EGCG from green tea and resveratrol from red grapes, reports Science Daily.

The findings, published in the Journal of Biological Chemistry, offer potential new targets for developing drugs to treat Alzheimer's disease, which affects some 800,000 people in Britain alone, and for which there is currently no cure.

Asian plants may offer remedy for diabetes

(IANS) / 8 February 2013 - Two plants from South East Asia may have anti-diabetic properties and could help tackle obesity as well, believe British researchers.



A team of researchers at the University of Greenwich plans to investigate *Cassia auriculata* and *Cassia alata* whose extracts could yield active ingredients for a remedy to diabetes which exists in two forms - Type 1 and Type 2. The group had previously hit upon a constituent called kaempferol 3-O-rutinoside from the extracts of one of the plants which was proven to be eight times more potent than the standard anti-diabetic drug acarbose.

The researchers have also identified anti-oxidant properties of the plants which aids in diabetes treatment.

“Our other most interesting finding is that many of the active ingredients from the *Cassia auriculata* plant work through a process called ‘synergism’—in other words, they work together to produce an effect greater than the sum of their individual effects,” says Dr. Solomon Habtemariam of the research team.

Fish oil protects dialysis patients from cardiac death

(IANS) / 7 February 2013 - Omega-3 fatty acids found in fish oils could protect dialysis patients from sudden cardiac deaths, says a study.

“We found that higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids in the blood of patients who were just starting (haemo) dialysis were very strongly associated with a lower risk of sudden cardiac death over the first year of their treatment,” says Allon N. Friedman, associate professor of medicine at the Indiana University School of Medicine and study co-author.

The study is based on 100 patients who died of such causes during their first year of haemodialysis, and 300 patients who survived, according to an Indiana statement.

“The risk of sudden cardiac death in haemodialysis patients is highest during the first year of treatment. The annual rate of such deaths is about six to seven percent, which may even exceed the rate in patients with heart failure,” Friedman said.

The five-year survival rate for patients on haemodialysis is 35 percent, with the risk of death highest in the first few months of starting treatment. The most common cause of death in these patients is sudden cardiac death, which accounts for about one out of every four deaths.

Vitamin C supplements tied to kidney stones

(Reuters) / 5 February 2013 - People who take vitamin C supplements are at higher-than-average risk of developing kidney stones, according to a Swedish study of more than 22,000 men.

‘It has long been suspected that high doses of vitamin C may increase the risk of kidney stones as some of the vitamin C absorbed by the body is excreted in urine as oxalate, one of the key components of kidney stones,’ said lead researcher Laura Thomas at the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm.

Thomas and her team, whose findings appeared in JAMA Internal medicine, used data from a large study of middle-aged and elderly Swedish men who answered a series of questions on their diet and lifestyle, then were tracked for an average of 11 years.

The current analysis included 907 men who said they took regular vitamin C tablets and more than 22,000 who didn’t use any nutritional supplements.

Of the vitamin C users, 3.4 percent developed kidney stones for the first time during the study, compared to 1.8 percent of non-supplement users. Men who took vitamin C supplements at least once a day had the highest risk of kidney stones.

Men are more likely to develop stones than women.

‘Vitamin C is an important part of a healthy diet,’ Thomas said. ‘Any effect of vitamin C on kidney stone risk is likely to depend both on the dose and on the combination of nutrients with which it is ingested.’

New cancer treatment with less side effects

(IANS) / 3 February 2013 - Bringing hope to hundreds of cancer patients, a new technology which delivers high doses of radiation with great accuracy into the human body has been introduced in the Indian capital and will help patients fight the disease with minimum side effects.

The CyberKnife Robotic Radiosurgery System is an advanced method of robotic delivery of high precision radiotherapy for treatment of tumors anywhere in the body.

'This is another form of Stereotactic Body Radiation Therapy (SBRT). Through this technique, we can give high dose radiation at specified locations and spare the normal tissues,' P.K. Julka, Head of Oncology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), told IANS. The technology delivers high doses of radiation with great accuracy in one to five sessions, unlike 30 to 40 sessions for conventional radiotherapy.

There are minimal or no side effects as compared to traditional radiotherapy procedures.

It is most effective when the disease is detected in the early stages. It offers the most precise treatment option for a wide range of patients. But the technique, which is quite common abroad, is not very cost effective.

Global use of diclofenac widespread, despite CV risks

Wed, 13/02/2013 - 11:30 - Cardiovascular risk of NSAIDs back in the spotlight

Diclofenac use remains widespread globally despite the drug's known cardiovascular risks; a study in PLOS Medicine has shown (online 12 February 2013).

Researchers looked at cardiovascular risk data for individual non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) from meta-analyses and found that diclofenac, rofecoxib and etoricoxib were consistently ranked highest in terms of cardiovascular risk, compared with non-use, and naproxen was associated with the lowest risk.

They found that diclofenac was on 74 countries' "essential medicines lists" (EMLs) and naproxen was listed on 27. Moreover, analyses of sales and prescription data from 15 high-, medium- and low-income countries revealed that diclofenac was the most commonly used

NSAID (27.8 per cent). Conversely, naproxen had an average market share of less than 10 per cent.

Aspirin use may cause age-related blindness

(IANS) / 22 January 2013 - SYDNEY – Aspirin is likely to raise the risk of age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a leading cause of blindness in older people, says an Australian study.

While a recent study suggested that regular aspirin use was linked with AMD, particularly the more visually devastating neovascular (wet) form, other studies have reported inconsistent findings.

Gerald Liew, from the University of Sydney and colleagues examined whether regular aspirin use (once or more per week) was tied to a higher risk of AMD by conducting a prospective analysis of data from a study that included four examinations during a 15-year period.

Of 2,389 participants, 257 individuals (10.8 percent) were regular aspirin users. After the 15-year follow-up, 63 individuals (24.5 percent) developed incident neovascular AMD, according to a Sydney statement.

"The cumulative incidence of neovascular AMD among non-regular aspirin users was 0.8 percent at five years, 1.6 percent at 10 years and 3.7 percent at 15 years; among regular aspirin users, the cumulative incidence was 1.9 percent at five years, 7 percent at 10 years and 9.3 percent at 15 years, respectively," the authors note.

FDA hearing on opioids reflects evolving view on painkiller use

February 11, 2013 - According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 16,000 people died of opioid overdoses in 2010 in New York, a number *The Wall Street Journal* says is more than those who fatally overdosed on all other illegal drugs combined. The FDA is trying to walk a very fine line between the dangers of addiction and the need for flexibility in how doctors treat patients with chronic pain.

The agency is considering a petition from a group of three dozen doctors from the Physicians for Responsible Opioid Prescribing (PROP), *The Wall Street Journal* points out. They have asked the agency to have the labels on the painkillers changed to put daily limits on

their use and to have doctors limit prescriptions to a 90-day supply. The proposed limits would not apply to cancer patients. The FDA also heard from parents whose children overdosed on opioids and from members and others. Dr. Edward Michna, of the American Pain Society, who practices at Brigham & Women's Hospital in Boston, said he is concerned that restrictions will make it hard to treat patients who suffer from chronic pain, *MedPage Today* reports.

The prescription pain drug market is valued at about \$9 billion. But the use and abuse of pain meds means it is a category that elicits strong opinions about how the drugs should be prescribed. The FDA is actually facing more than whether labels should be updated. It also is

considering whether to require all opioids to come with tamper-resistant features, particularly now that generics of some of the most used pain drugs are about to launch in the U.S. Purdue Pharma reworked its OxyContin formula to make the powerful opioid pills more difficult to abuse, as did Endo Pharmaceuticals (\$ENDP) with its Opana ER.

The FDA has only hinted at where it is leaning. Last month, in draft guidance on developing such features, the FDA said that while opioid analgesics are important to modern pain management, their abuse has created "a serious and growing public health problem." It called development of abuse-deterrent formulations "a high public health priority."

Source: Drugs.com & worldpharmanews.com

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