

Air travellers' thrombosis study obtains funding

On 14 May WHO started what is expected to be a four-year research programme on venous thrombosis and air travel. With initial funding of €1.8 million from the UK Department of Transport, and more expected from the European Commission, the study will attempt to determine the frequency and causes of thrombosis in air travellers and the ways in which it can be prevented. Research activities planned include the collection and analysis of epidemiological data to find out who is at risk. This will take into account previous history of thrombosis, use of oral contraceptives or hormone replacement therapy, recent illness and genetic susceptibility, as well as conditions on board, and in-flight behaviour. Causal mechanisms will also be studied, such as the effects of immobility, low cabin pressure and oxygen levels. In addition, clinical studies will assess the effectiveness of preventive measures such as exercise, compression stockings and anti-clotting drugs. The research programme will be conducted under the auspices of WHO and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). The International Air Transport Association is also supporting the programme.

Further information can be obtained from Reshma Prakash, prakashr@who.int.

Traditional medicine strategy launched

WHO has launched a global plan to make the use of traditional medicine safer, more accessible, and sustainable. Up to 80% of people in developing countries use traditional, complementary or alternative medicine (TM/CAM) as part of primary health care, and its use is increasing in the north. The global market for traditional therapies is

US\$ 60 billion and growing. This trend brings with it the risk of making some traditional therapies unaffordable to those who now depend on them. The plan points out the need for policies

to protect indigenous and traditional knowledge, and for ways to ensure the safety of therapies and prevent their misuse.

The WHO strategy aims to assist countries to build policies for the evaluation and regulation of TM/CAM products and practices; strengthen the evidence base for the safety, efficacy and quality of these products and practices; ensure their availability and affordability; and promote their sound use by providers and consumers.

"Traditional or complementary medicine is the victim of both uncritical enthusiasts and uninformed sceptics," explained Dr Yasuhiro Suzuki, WHO Executive Director for Health Technology and Pharmaceuticals. "This strategy is intended to tap into its real potential for people's health and well-being while minimizing the risks of unproven or misused remedies."

About a quarter of today's modern medicines have been developed from plants first used traditionally. The Chinese herbal remedy *Artemisia annua*, which has been in use for almost 2000 years, was recently found to be effective against drug-resistant malaria. In South Africa, the Medical Research Council is conducting studies on the plant *Sutherlandia microphylla*, traditionally used as a tonic and now thought to increase energy and appetite in people living with HIV/AIDS. Meanwhile, people in rich countries are turning increasingly to alternative medicines and treatments, especially for preventive and palliative care. Details of the strategy for making the most judicious and just use possible of TM/CAM can be found at www.who.int/medicines/organization/trm/orgtrmmain.shtml.

FIFA wins WHO award for making World Cup tobacco free

The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has won WHO's tobacco control award for its opposition to smoking, culminating in its decision to declare this year's World Cup events tobacco free. The award was presented at FIFA's 53rd

Congress in Seoul, Republic of Korea, on 28 May.

"Sports and tobacco do not mix," said Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland. "WHO's decision to back our public cause is a significant step towards achieving this goal. The world's biggest sporting event is now tobacco-free."

As part of the Memorandum of Cooperation signed by WHO and FIFA, there was no tobacco advertising or promotion at World Cup venues, no sale of tobacco products there, and no smoking in public areas except in clearly marked smoking zones. Frequent announcements reminded the public about the tobacco-free policy.

Further progress towards dissociating sports from tobacco was marked with the decision of the Fédération Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) to make its matches tobacco-free as well. FIVB is one of the largest sports federations, with members in 217 countries. Its President, Rubén Acosta said "Volleyball provides millions of people all over the world with fun, athleticism and exciting competition. We believe it is very important to join forces with WHO to make sure those people hear and understand the tobacco-free message."

Staff changes at WHO headquarters

Yasuhiro Suzuki, on secondment from the Government of Japan for the last four years, returns to Japan at the end of June. Anarfi Asamoah-Baah will replace him as Executive Director, Health Technologies and Pharmaceuticals. Nadia Younes is to be Executive Director, External Relations and Governing Bodies. David Nabarro is now Executive Director, Sustainable Development and Healthy Environments. Denis Aitken is Chef de Cabinet and Head of the Director-General's office. ■