Journal Scan

Keeping brain cells alive

Preventing brain cells dying as a result of oxygen deprivation might become possible.

Oxygen deprivation triggers biochemical events that lead to cell death up to 12 hours later.

During apoptosis enzymes called caspases are released that make cell proteins disintegrate. Researchers have attempted to block the action of caspases with a substance called BAF.

Rats were exposed to half the normal amount of oxygen for two hours. Half were then injected with BAF up to three hours later.

Those given BAF lost no more than 20 per cent of tissue in the cortex and hippocampus, compared with about 50 per cent in those not injected.


High heeled shoes bad for knees

Wearing high heeled shoes might predispose women to osteoarthritis of the knee, say American researchers.

Twenty healthy women who were comfortable wearing high heeled shoes were studied.

They were asked to walk across a gait laboratory walkway wearing shoes and barefoot while forces applied about the leg joints were measured. There was increased force across the patellofemoral joint and a greater compressive force on the medial compartment of the knee, on average 23 per cent greater during walking in high heels.


Hypertension and dementia linked

Effective treatment of hypertension in middle life might reduce the risk of later dementia, new research has found. The records of 8,006 men who had been examined between 1965 and 1968, when they were in their 40s or 50s, were studied. Three follow-up examinations had been undertaken in the period up to 1993. Those with untreated hypertension were five times more likely to have developed dementia than normotensive men. The risk was not increased in those whose hypertension was controlled.


Untreated hypertension may increase risk of dementia in later life

Breaking through in Parkinson’s?

A device that might help relieve the symptoms of Parkinson’s disease has been hailed as one of the most significant developments in the treatment of the illness in 30 years. The treatment, Activa Parkinson’s Control Therapy, is delivered by gadgets that are the size of cardiac pacemakers implanted into the chest. Activa uses mild electrical stimulation to block brain signals that cause symptoms and, by using a hand held unit, patients can literally switch off these symptoms.

However, some health authorities are concerned about cost: £15,000 is required to purchase and implant the device. They also claim that its benefits have not been proved in clinical trials.

Rewind

A round-up of recent news events

Celebration at Abbey

Nurses celebrated International Nurses Day. Yvonne Moores, England’s chief nurse, was among the congregation at Westminster Abbey commemorating the life of Florence Nightingale, while Princess Alexandra attended a service in Belfast. The RCN held an exhibition in Wales showing photographs of 50 years of nursing in the NHS. Nurses who had worked in the NHS during its early years attended an RCN tea party where general secretary Christine Hancock said they had: ‘laid a tremendous path for nursing and that we, the present day nurses, will never forget the foundations you laid for us’.

Media storm over nurses

Lucille McLaughlan and Deborah Parry, the two nurses convicted of a murder in Saudi Arabia which they claim they were forced into admitting, flew back to Britain amid protests over the sale of their stories to the media and controversy over their right to practise. George Galloway, a Labour MP, sent a written complaint to the UKCC calling for their suspension from the register pending a full investigation. Ms McLaughlan faces a charge of theft at Dundee Sheriff Court this month. She is accused of stealing from a former patient.

Waiting list pledges attacked

Government pledges to cut waiting lists by 100,000 came under attack as the latest figures showed a rise of nearly 36,000. The number of patients now waiting to be admitted for planned treatment has reached almost 1.3 million. Concern over nurse shortages has deepened in the light of the figures and nurse representatives say that without extra staff, patient care will suffer. The government was warned by health service managers that it would have to do more than throw money at the crisis, and that cutting waiting lists required facilities, staff and organisation.