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Bad effects of good medicines

(NAPS)—Although most drugs are safe and effective when taken as intended, according to the magazine *U.S. News & World Report*, as many as two million patients “are hospitalized each year and as many as 140,000 people die because of side effects or reaction to various drugs.” Many of them are common drugs used by millions to treat asthma, cancer, arthritis, infection and heart disease.

Why is the public unaware? According to Food and Drug Administration chief David Kessler, only about one percent of all serious drug reactions are reported to the FDA.

Is this due to a failure of our medical system? There are many opinions, but the most balanced

seems to be that, like just about everything else, it's a matter of economics.

The FDA has no funding to test drugs itself. Instead, it relies on data supplied by the pharmaceutical manufacturers which may test the medication on only two to three thousand patients in clinical trials. When a new drug is introduced to the general population, it can happen that unexpected side effects show up—all too often with fatal consequences.

Medication-related deaths or disabilities are not necessarily caused by drugs that are bad in themselves. Many medical malpractice law suits result from dosage errors. In addition, many medications are prescribed with

insufficient knowledge about drug interactions or contraindications.

"Actually, all drugs can be dangerous," says a spokesperson for Attorneys Across America. Attorneys Across America is a nationwide law firm that represents medical malpractice victims. The firm maintains a toll free helpline (1-800-A-A-A-A-LAW) for seriously injured persons.

Experts advise that, more often than not, the victim and the family never know that the real cause of a death or disability was actually related to a medication.

While, the lawyers say, the vast majority of doctors and hospitals are both trustworthy and highly skilled, there is a tiny percentage that make most of the mistakes that end up as malpractice suits.

New treatments for sickle cell

(NAPS)—Sickle cell anemia is a painful inherited blood disorder that strikes one in every 400 African-Americans born today. New medical technologies such as gene therapy hold promise as an eventual cure, but in the meantime, innovative drug therapies are proving effective in alleviating the disease's symptoms.

This incurable disease affects hemoglobin, the part of the red blood cells that carry oxygen. Upon delivery of oxygen to the tissues, the red blood cells become rigid and misshapen. This severely impedes their flow through small blood vessels and the body's tissues become starved for oxygen. The most severely affected patients face nearly a dozen hospitalizations each year.

Ultimately, sickle cell anemia can lead to life-threatening stroke, lung complications, overwhelming infections, and profound anemia.

Studies at the National Institutes of Health have focused on new treatments and the search for a cure.

One recent advance resulting from early studies here involves the use of the chemotherapy drug hydroxyurea. It stimulates the production of a type of hemoglobin called fetal hemoglobin. Such treatment helps keep blood cells pliable and results in fewer painful episodes in adults with the disease. Similar studies are underway in children.

For a list of Medicine for the Public booklets, write: Clinical Center Communications, National Institutes of Health, 10 Center Drive, Bldg. 10, Room 1C255 MSC 1170, Bethesda, Md. 20892-1170.

Migraine hampers social life of women sufferers

(NAPS)—Migraine, a serious, often debilitating disease that affects one in six American women—an estimated 18 million—can rob them of their social life, according to a new national study.

More than half of women sufferers reported having to cancel or postpone social activities due to migraine.

Migraine is characterized by severe pain usually on one side of the head, and often accompanied by nausea, vomiting and sensitivity to light, sound or smell. Attacks occur periodically and can last from four to 72 hours.

A new study showed that migraine affects women in virtually every aspect of their lives, often isolating them from the activities and people they care

about most.

Self-esteem, career growth and family life were a few areas in which women reported experiencing more negative effects than men.

According to a psychologist, the impact of migraine on the social lives of women is significant.

"First, women often are not taken seriously. Second, migraine is a misunderstood disease. Therefore, when a woman cancels a social engagement because of a 'headache,' friends may accuse her of making excuses to avoid participating," the psychologist said.

"Such accusations can condition women sufferers to mask their pain for fear of damaging yet

another relationship or being considered 'unreliable.' Such attitudes can also keep women from seeking the treatment they need."

The study showed that life would be different for women if not for migraine. Some reported that their levels of social activity would increase, and that they would work/study more/ better, feel more relieved and happy, and have less stress.

While migraine cannot be cured, physicians emphasize that sufferers do not have to sacrifice their social life because of migraine—the disease can be treated and managed.

If you suffer from headaches and suspect they may be migraine, it is important to see a physician for an appropriate diagnosis and treatment program.

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