

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Healthbeat

Meningitis kills 544 in Burkina Faso

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso (PANA) – At least 3,779 cases of meningitis, including 544 deaths, were recorded in Burkina Faso in the past two-and-half months, the ministry of health reported.

Burkinabe health ministry's Dr. Jean Gabriel Woango told a news conference that the mortality rate of the epidemic in its 11th week is 15.17 percent for 12 of Burkina Faso's 45 provinces so far affected.

Woango said government has set up crisis cells in Ouagadougou and most areas affected by the epidemic, while there is free immunization of inhabitants in those areas. In addition to immunization, the crisis cells sensitize inhabitants by insisting on the practice of hygiene.

Meanwhile, the director of discount store for generic drugs, Lazare Bancé, said 800,000 doses of vaccine are available in the country, while WHO has donated 1.9 million doses against meningitis.

In 2001, Burkina Faso recorded some 13,293 cases of meningitis, including 1,854 deaths or a mortality rate of 14 percent.

Dentist's discovery could soon make candy good for teeth

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) – Candy may soon be good for your teeth, if the work of Lincoln native and dental researcher Max Anderson proves successful.

Anderson, who works for dental health plan company Washington Dental Service, predicted a new treatment he is working on will turn cavities into historical curiosities within a decade.

"We'll see a huge decrease in the number of cavities in the treated population," said Anderson, a graduate of the University of Nebraska Medical Center's College of Dentistry.

Anderson is working with a UCLA researcher on an herb-based mixture that kills bacteria that cause cavities and gum disease. He believes the concoction could be used in toothpaste, mouthwash, breath mints, pet food – even candy.

He declined to name the four herbs involved until patents are approved.

The compound also can interrupt the transfer of cavity-causing bacteria from mother to baby, which could protect children for a lifetime, Anderson said.

Some Florida researchers are using genetically altered strains of a cavity-fighting bacteria that show promise in animals, but human trials have not begun. Approval from the Food and Drug Administration could take up to 10 years.

Anderson's compound could be available within one or two years, because herbal compounds don't require the same type of FDA approval as medicines, he said.

Health crisis looms for AIDS orphans

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (GIN) – Government resources may be unable to meet the health and welfare needs posed by an estimated 700,000 AIDS orphans, half of whom may be infected with HIV, according to a new study.

In a paper presented last week at a conference on Children, Aids and Communal Coping Strategies, the head of University of Fort Hare's Center for Development Studies, Pricilla Monyai, warned that with the HIV/AIDS pandemic, African governments and their populations faced health and welfare demands "way out of proportion with available resources."

The conference, hosted by the university, drew representatives from Botswana, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Norway. It aims to develop the foundations for a regional research program on communal coping strategies of children affected by HIV/AIDS.

Monyai pointed out that Africa had lost more than 17 million people to AIDS, the southern African region accounted for 98 percent of all new infections, with South Africa "taking the lead" in the rate of daily infections.

According to UNAIDS 1999 figures, of the 13.1-million children orphaned by AIDS globally, 12 million lived in Africa.

"Their number is escalating and is posing a serious threat to the already over-burdened and under-resourced health systems in many African countries," said Monyai.

She said the idea behind the project was to look at how local communities and families infected and affected by HIV/AIDS collectively coped with the consequences of the disease, and the extent to which they were able to care for the children in need.

"The social conditions and needs of children and families in local communities affected by HIV/AIDS are complex and need to be captured."

She said current research showed that children orphaned by AIDS suffered "cumulative pain and stress" as a result of the struggle to survive.

Grief and confusion through the loss of a loved one and the struggle to survive was sometimes compounded by prejudice and exclusion. Many orphaned by AIDS were left struggling, neglected and ill.

Public beach sand bound for private, eroding beach

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) – Sand from a public beach will be used to renourish an eroding beach at the private Wild Dunes Resort after the state Department of Health and Environmental Control upheld a challenged permit.

DHEC's 7-4 decision came after Dr. James W. Smiley and D. Reid Wiseman challenged an open-ended permit issued last year to Wild Dunes Community Association. High wind drives surf beneath homes and spreads sand 10 inches thick on roads.

DHEC board member John P. Edwards said the project is not in the public interest. "I can't understand how Wild Dunes can get public sand for free from a public beach," he said.

An administrative law judge ruled last year that Smiley and Reid didn't have anything at stake in the issue and allowed the permit to go forward.

Smiley said the renourishment project was the equivalent of "robbing Peter to pay Paul." He says the project will disrupt his morning jogs on the public beach. "This is where I live, and this is where I have jogged for 20 years."

Nursing shortage to be researched

UNC NEWS SERVICES

CHAPEL HILL – Medication errors, falls hospitalized patients suffer, job turnover in nursing staff and patient satisfaction across the United States are among subjects University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill faculty will investigate through a new \$2.5 million grant from the National Institute of Nursing Research.

"We are experiencing an increasing shortage of registered nurses," said Dr. Barbara A. Mark, Sarah Frances Russell professor of nursing at the UNC School of Nursing. "There has been a lot of attention in the past few years about nursing units being short-staffed and about how staffing affects the quality of patient care."

"Some people believe that there aren't enough nurses in acute care hospitals to take adequate care of patients. It doesn't look like the situation is going to improve anytime soon and, in fact, is likely to get worse."

In their study, which is a five-year continuation of a project that began in 1995, Mark and colleagues are trying to understand how nursing staffs are organized in hospitals to help take care of patients and examine other staffing and patient outcomes issues, she said. With nurses in short supply, it's important to know more about their contributions to patient care quality.



File photo
Researchers are trying to understand how nursing staffs are organized in hospitals to take care of patients and examine other staffing and patient outcome issues.

Researchers will concentrate on 160 acute care hospitals and collect a wealth of information on patients' experiences, including satisfaction with pain management and how nurses help

relieve distressing symptoms, she said. They also will examine how registered nurses feel about their jobs, decision-making responsibilities and relationships with physicians, social workers,

physical therapists and others involved in patient care.

"In the interest of patient safety and satisfaction, it's important that we develop a better understanding of what's happening and what needs to change," she said. "Fewer people are entering nursing school, and more nurses are reaching retirement age. Also, baby boomers are starting to get old and will need hospital care in coming years. The nation needs to be ready for them."

Since the Institute of Medicine issued reports indicating that tens of thousands of important mistakes are made in U.S. hospitals every year, the UNC faculty members also want to learn how nursing staff levels affect such errors, Mark said.

"When we are finished, we hope to have a better idea of how nursing contributes to the quality of health care and patient safety," she said. "From that, we plan to create interventions hospitals can use to improve the quality of care and patient safety."

Already, more than 130 U.S. hospitals have agreed to participate in the effort, Mark said. All information from hospitals, patients, nurses and others will remain confidential.

Others participating in the research are Drs. Cheryl Jones, associate professor of nursing; Sharon Eck, clinical director of the UNC Women's Hospital; and Michael J. Belyea, research associate professor of nursing.

Postpartum depression

Mothers of newborns can experience mild to severe physical, emotional and behavioral changes, official says

BY PAUL COLLINS
THE CHRONICLE

Andy Hagler, executive director of the Mental Health Association of Forsyth County Inc., said on Friday that, on a personal level, he was shocked that a Texas jury, this month, found



Hagler

Andrea Yates guilty of capital murder for drowning her five children.

"I was just really surprised because of her history of mental illness, because it is very obvious that she had mental illness, and because this is a woman who needed help... Obviously there had been some (mental health) treatment failure."

Hagler said, "I think the sad part is I feel like the system let her down. Apparently she did try to get help and that she had just not received the care she should have."

Hagler said, "I'm glad that she didn't get the death penalty (she was sentenced to life in prison). As an advocate (a mental

health advocate), I hope she is going to get, in prison, the mental health help she needs."

According to a Reuters new report, mental health experts testified Yates was suffering from demonic delusions because of a combination of schizophrenia and postpartum depression that had not been properly treated. She had twice tried suicide and been in and out of mental hospitals in the two years before she drowned her children.

What is postpartum depression (PPD)?

Hagler said that having a baby can be very exciting and joyous for the mother, but it also can be stressful. According to the Office on Women's Health, the turmoil of pregnancy and childbirth can leave many mothers said, anxious, afraid and confused. A lot of these feelings are common and sometimes are dismissed as normal. But these feelings should not just be dismissed, because the mother may be suffering from postpartum depression, which describes a range of physical, emotional and behavioral changes that many new mothers experience after their babies are born. The symptoms can range from mild to severe.

There are several ranges of postpartum conditions:



Photo by Zuma Press

Andrea Yates, husband Rusty and four of their children

The first range is known as "the baby blues," or postpartum blues. This condition occurs in many mothers in the days immediately after childbirth. It is characterized by sudden mood swings, ranging from euphoria to intense sadness. Symptoms may include crying for no apparent

reason, impatience, irritability, restlessness, anxiety, loneliness, sadness, low self-esteem, increased sensitivity and heightened feelings of vulnerability.

Baby blues can last as short as a few hours or as long as one or two weeks after delivery. The

See PPD on C4

Bill Gates grants Kenya \$2 million to fight AIDS

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

NAIROBI, Kenya (PANA) – American computer software tycoon, Bill Gates has announced a \$2 million grant to Kenya to boost the fight against sexually transmitted infections (STI), including HIV/AIDS.

The tycoon's father, Bill Gates Sr., made the announcement in Nairobi on behalf of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Half of the money will go to support the government's



Gates

efforts in combating STI/AIDS, while another million will support the faculty of health's programs at the Moi University.

Bill Gates Sr., accompanied by former U.S. President

See Gates on C5

Suicide by gun for black males climbed sharply

BY MARYCLAIRE DALE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA – The rate of suicide by gun among black male teen-agers nearly quadrupled between 1979 and 1994 before falling off somewhat in the late 1990s, according to a study.

The rate among white male teen-agers climbed by more than a third during the period before dropping back some.

Traditionally, blacks have

had much lower suicide rates than whites, but the availability of guns may help account for the narrowing of the gap among young men, researchers said.

"One of the factors is the easy availability of firearms, especially when suicide is impulsive behavior," said former Surgeon General David Satcher, now a visiting fellow with the Kaiser Family Foundation. He was not involved with the study.

See Suicide on C5