Profile

The National Heart Foundation of Australia was founded in 1960 and has a wide range of research and educational activities related to hypertension prevention and control. These are coordinated by the Blood Pressure Committee, whose membership includes eminent physiologists and physicians specialising in research and the treatment of hypertension. A recent educational activity of this Committee involved the updating of a series of pamphlets on the management of blood pressure intended for general practitioners and covering topics such as which antihypertensive drugs to choose, non-pharmacological methods for treating hypertension, hypertension in the elderly, hypertension in pregnancy and high blood pressure in children. The Committee also published a new, simple, public education leaflet to complement the more detailed booklet “High blood pressure: the facts”.

An important 10-year study of risk factor prevalence has been conducted in collaboration with the Commonwealth Government. Three national surveys held in 1980, 1983 and 1989 collected a wealth of information on the demographic and physical characteristics, health and behaviour of randomly selected people 25–64 years old living in state capital cities of Australia. The objectives of the study are to determine the prevalence of factors thought to be associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, to compare the prevalence of these risk factors between geographical regions and population groups and to monitor changes in their prevalence over a 10-year

to be continued on page 2

WHL News

The Chinese Hypertension League and the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences are organising an international symposium, “Hypertension and Coronary Heart Disease”, Oct. 2–4, 1991 in Beijing, People's Republic of China. Major topics will include the pathogenesis of hypertension and atherosclerosis, application of molecular biology in the field of hypertensiology and advances in non-pharmacological and drug treatment of hypertension and coronary heart disease. The WHL is co-sponsoring this meeting. For further information contact:

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period. The factors studied were blood pressure levels, blood lipid levels, cigarette smoking, body weight and amount of physical activity. The results showed that between 1980 and 1983 the proportion of untreated hypertensive subjects decreased from 14.6% to 7.9% (men) and from 6.9% to 3.9% (women). The overall proportion of hypertensive subjects decreased also. Results from the third survey will give valuable information about further changes in blood pressure levels and treatment in Australia.

Some other recent work by the Foundation in relation to hypertension included a submission to the Government for a national campaign to encourage therapy for raised blood pressure and cholesterol level and the release of a policy on alcohol. The Foundation will continue a broad range of activities in relation to hypertension prevention and control, from educating the public and medical profession about the condition to research into its prevalence and the role of its management in primary and secondary prevention of cardiovascular disease.

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Scientific News

Healthy Living Is Worthwhile

Several recent studies point to a great and quick benefit of healthy living and control of risk factors. Data from the Framingham study show a 60% drop in mortality due to cardiovascular disease from 1950 to 1970 (1). Based on a careful analysis, the authors attribute most of this change to an improved control of risk factors, although better medical intervention may also have contributed. In another report (2), results from the MRFIT study emphasise the advantages of risk factor control including stepped care antihypertensive drug therapy over a follow-up period of 10 years. Lastly, researchers in California, using repeated quantitative coronary angiography, found a significant overall regression of coronary atherosclerosis after only 1 year of comprehensive life-style changes (3).

References:
(2) MRFIT Research Group (1990) JAMA 263: 1795–1801

More on the J-curve

Several studies published over the last years raised the issue of whether lowering diastolic blood pressure below 80 mmHg might actually increase the risk of myocardial infarction (1, 2). The graphic description of this effect has been labelled the "J-curve". Prof. Amery and his group discussed this issue in a previous Newsletter (3) and pointed to some of the methodological problems in those studies. In a recently published meta-analysis of 9 large prospective observational studies including a total of 420,000 individuals, no J-curved association between diastolic blood pressure and coronary heart disease could be demonstrated (4). Indeed, the combined results clearly showed that risks of stroke and coronary heart disease are positively related to blood pressure even in normotensives and not only in hypertensives.

References:
(2) Samuelsson OG et al. (1990) J Hypert 8: 547–555
(3) Stassen J et al. (1990) WHL Newsletter 9: 2
(4) MacMahon S et al. (1990) Lancet 335: 765–774

The WHO estimates that there will be 3 million tobacco-related deaths per year in the 1990s.
In Focus

Alcohol and Blood Pressure
At the last WHL Council Conference the relationship between alcohol consumption and blood pressure was discussed. Dr. L. J. Beilin from the University of Western Australia has prepared a manuscript describing the issue in detail. A cause and effect relationship between regular alcohol consumption and blood pressure elevation was first suggested in 1915, and now a substantial body of evidence has been collected from epidemiological data and controlled experimental studies. Taking all results together, consumption of three or more standard drinks per day will result in a two-fold higher prevalence of hypertension. The effects of excessive body weight and alcohol consumption are independent, but additive. In several studies a clear dose-response relationship between alcohol consumption and blood pressure could be demonstrated.

The evidence suggests that ethanol per se is the responsible agent, as the rise in blood pressure occurred independently of the type of liquor consumed. Encouraging are results from controlled studies that demonstrated a decline of blood pressure within a few weeks after the cessation of drinking.

It is still unclear how alcohol raises blood pressure. There are some investigations showing changes in baroreceptor control. Plasma renin, angiotensin, aldosterone and cortisol levels seem to be unaffected. Also, it is currently not possible to predict who will be most likely to react with elevated blood pressure to alcohol consumption.

Nevertheless, in view of the clear-cut evidence for the pressor effect of alcohol, all hypertensive patients should be carefully questioned with regard to alcohol consumption and advised to decrease intake to less than three drinks per day. In some instances this will abolish the requirement for drug treatment, or reduce the amount of drugs needed.

A WHL In Focus consensus paper based on Dr. Beilin's report will be forthcoming shortly. For further information contact the newsletter office.

WHL Materials

ISH Satellite Symposium
New Vistas on Non-pharmacological Approaches to Hypertension
A satellite symposium to the International Society of Hypertension meeting was held in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, on June 23, 1990. This was co-sponsored by a number of international organisations including the WHO and WHL. The first overview of the final report of the WHO CARDIAC (CARDiovascular DISEASEs and Alimentary Comparison) study was released at this meeting. There was a total of 24 oral and 29 poster presentations, and about 200 participants from 27 countries attended the conference. The session topics were: reports from CARDIAC centres worldwide; methodology and its application to international comparison study; non-pharmacological management of hypertension; experimental nutrition; and pathophysiological and socio-ecological studies.

The proceedings of the conference will appear shortly. They were edited by Drs. Arun Chockalingam, Yukio Yamori and George Fodor. For further information, please contact Dr. Arun Chockalingam, c/o Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada A1B 3V6.

The WHL was founded in 1983 by 7 national organisations committed to the control of hypertension. Membership has grown to 28 since then, and over 2.5 billion people live in WHL member countries. Of these, over 500 million are likely to suffer from hypertension, and 100 million of them inadequately controlled at conservative estimate.
Useful Material

With Every Beat of Your Heart

The National Institutes of Health (USA) recently published an idea book for community health heart programmes. The 60-page booklet contains some basic comments on starting and expanding community programmes, fact sheets on cardiovascular disease and possible intervention strategies as well as an impressive collection of suggestions. These are grouped into programmes of interest to health agencies, health professionals, industrial companies, schools and churches. They focus on quitting smoking, intervention to lower cholesterol levels and ways of improving hypertension control. A number of the described activities are specially designed to reach minority groups, whose hypertension control is often very poor. The examples given are taken from all over the USA and from a variety of cultural settings as well. Although there will probably be only a few programmes that can be directly transplanted to other countries, the booklet will be helpful for every programme planner and health care worker active in health promotion.

Individual copies can be requested from the National Institutes of Health, NHLBI Information Center, 4733 Bethesda Avenue, Suite 530, Bethesda, MD 20814-4820, USA, or through the Newsletter office in Heidelberg.

Calendar

Cardiovascular Health
The National Conference on Cholesterol and High Blood Pressure Control
April 8–10, 1991
Washington, DC, USA
Information: The National Conference on Cholesterol and High Blood Pressure Control
4733 Bethesda Avenue, Suite 530
Bethesda, MD 20814-4820, USA

XIII National Meeting of the Spanish League against Arterial Hypertension
April 10–13, 1991
Valencia, Spain
Information: Spanish League against Arterial Hypertension
Apartado de Correos 46.234
28080 Madrid, Spain

4th International Symposium on Cardiovascular Pharmacology
April 22–25, 1991
Geneva, Switzerland
Information: ISCP '91
c/o AKM Congress Service
Clarastrasse 57, PO. Box 6
4005 Basel, Switzerland

International Conference on Coronary Risk Factors in Childhood (AHA)
May 12–15, 1991
Washington, DC, USA
Information: American Heart Association, National Center
7320 Greenville Avenue
Dallas, TX 75231, USA

1991 meeting of the American Society of Hypertension
May 15–19, 1991
New York, USA
Information: Pat Chalmers
American Society of Hypertension
515 Madison Avenue, Suite 2100
New York, NY 10022, USA

International Conference on Stroke
May 30–June 1, 1991
Geneva, Switzerland
Information: N.M. Bornstein, MD
International Conference on Stroke
Kuoni Travel Ltd., 7, Rue de Berne
1211 Geneva, Switzerland

Impressum

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