



Editorial team strengthened

The editorial team has been strengthened by the addition of Dr Nonhlanhla Khumalo, who joined the HMPG as part-time Deputy Editor in January 2007. Apart from general editorial responsibilities she will be the editor of the new *South African Journal of Child Health*, to be launched in March 2007.

Nonhlanhla is a specialist dermatologist who is in the process of completing her PhD in the Department of Public Health at UCT. She has had considerable research experience both locally and overseas and has several scientific publications to her credit. She also enjoys writing for a wider audience. Her maiden editorial 'How common is condom failure?' appears in this issue of *SAMJ* (p. 143). For many the condom is considered to be a fail-safe mechanism for the prevention of HIV infection and of other sexually transmitted diseases. But condom failure is by no means unknown, as shown in this editorial.

On behalf of our readers and staff, we welcome Nonhlanhla and wish her a satisfying and growing experience in the world of medical publishing!

Improving asthma outcomes

A shift in thinking on the management of asthma away from simply preventing death and hospitalisations and towards achieving and maintaining sustained control of all clinical features is strongly advocated by Green, Zar and Bateman (p. 172). They note that advances in asthma management, particularly the introduction of controller medication of which inhaled corticosteroids are the most important, has resulted in a steady decline in asthma mortality in most countries.

South Africa's figures show that the 12-month prevalence of asthma among 13 - 14-year-old adolescents was higher than either the African or the global average, and it is increasing. South Africa ranks 4th or 5th highest in the world, whether expressed as deaths as a percentage of the total population or of the asthma population.

What is required is a sustained and co-ordinated emphasis on management of chronic respiratory disease in which the diagnosis and management of asthma remains an important priority.

New insights into HIV incidence

The HIV incidence estimates reflect the underlying transmission dynamics that are currently at work in South Africa. HIV *incidence* is a point estimate of recent infections, while HIV *prevalence* is the result of cumulative new infections over time minus the cumulative deaths among HIV-infected persons.

The study by Rehle, Shisana and co-authors (p. 194) and the accompanying editorial by Salim Karim (p. 190) provide new insights into the South African HIV epidemic. The study indicates that 571 000 new HIV infections occurred in the population 2 years and older during the year 2005 in South Africa. Of all new infections, 34% occurred in young people

aged 15 - 24 years. The incidence rates among young females in their prime childbearing age are especially alarming. The HIV incidence among females in the 20 - 29 age group was 5.6%, more than 6 times that in males of the same age. Among youth aged 15 - 24 years, females account for 90% of recent HIV infections. Although only 8.7% of the total South African population aged 2 years and above lives in urban informal settlements, 29.1% of the total estimated number of new HIV infections are found in this residence geotype. Widowed individuals (median age 43 years, 79% females) had a remarkably high HIV incidence, pointing to a lack of perceived risk of HIV infection among older people in South Africa. The findings also support findings from Uganda that suggest an increased risk of HIV acquisition during pregnancy.

The highly resourced plethora of prevention programmes in South Africa has failed to address HIV incidence in high-risk categories sufficiently, and more efficient and targeted interventions are urgently required (see also Chris Bateman, p. 158).

Restaurant revenues and smoking control

Smoking regulations are again being strongly debated in the parliamentary structures. The study by Walbeek, Blecher and van Graan (p. 208), who report on their investigation on the impact of the restrictions on smoking in indoor public places on the financial situation of the hospitality industry, is therefore timely.

Tobacco control interventions are fought on economic, not public health, grounds. The industry argues that a decrease in tobacco use will have detrimental consequences, not only for the industry itself but for a number of related industries. Despite the hospitality and tobacco industries' claim that the law restricting smoking in restaurants would have very detrimental financial consequences, their evidence does not support this. Furthermore, the new smoking policies have been accepted by non-smokers (nearly 100%) and smokers (87%) alike.

Aggressive management of spinal injuries

Historically spinal cord injuries were treated conservatively with a low operative rate. Frielingsdorf and Dunn (p. 203) report on the aggressive surgical approach that is maintained because of the limited number of beds in the unit. With increased supportive care, life expectancy of the quadriplegic is increasing – a quadriplegic can expect 70% of normal life expectancy. This study demonstrates that early aggressive care in an appropriate centre yields reasonable survival levels at 1 year.

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