

Promising results for new tuberculosis therapy

Hopes of shorter duration treatment for tuberculosis (TB) are rising in the wake of preliminary findings from a clinical trial indicating that new combination therapy including the antibiotic Moxifloxacin can cut the time needed to cure drug-susceptible TB to 4 from 6 months.

The drug is now in the advanced stage of clinical trials and could conceivably be available by 2012 to aid nations struggling with a high incidence of TB, like India, which now contributes about one-third of the world's cases. The highly contagious bacterial disease annually kills over 2 million people worldwide.

The preliminary findings of a study of moxifloxacin as a new treatment for TB, presented at the 47th Interscience Conference on Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy in Chicago last fall, indicated it is far more potent than standard therapy, which uses an older anti-TB drug, ethambutol. Substituting moxifloxacin for ethambutol in DOTS (directly observed therapy short course, the standard therapy for TB) could also make treatment far less costly, allowing TB programs to expand their coverage. It could be "a significant measure to improve TB treatment, provided the treatment is more effective, safe and relatively cheaper," Bikram Saha, assistant professor of medicine at the Midnapore Medical College in West Bengal, told *CMAJ*.

"Tuberculosis is a big problem in developing countries, so we should welcome any innovative approach to control the disease. But it's essential that all the newer approaches should be thoroughly scanned through clinical studies."

"This is the most compelling evidence in nearly 25 years that a novel antibiotic drug combination works better than the current gold standard at curing active TB infection," said John Hopkins University School of Medicine Professor of Medicine, Epidemiology and International Health Richard E. Chaisson in a press release. "Beyond the obvious value of healing patients more quickly, a shorter treatment time could also cut down on

transmission of the disease to others and make it easier for health care workers worldwide, who are overwhelmed by a large number of patients, to treat more people and to treat them faster." — Sanjit Bagchi MBBS, Kolkata, India

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Stop that smoking car!

Anti-smoking activists say a new bar for protecting children from the harmful effects of tobacco was raised in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, when the municipality became the first in Canada to ban adults from smoking in automobiles when anyone under the age of 18 is present.

The bylaw, passed unanimously by the Wolfville town council last November, is scheduled to come into effect in June. First violators will receive a warning but drivers who subsequently fail to butt out will be issued a \$50–\$200 fine.

"The council, I think, has once again reflected the conscience of the commu-

nity while dealing with an issue on behalf of an element of the population, that is, children, that don't always or often have the right to change the environment in which they might find themselves," Mayor Bob Stead told reporters.

"It's an important issue," said Dr. Don Pugsley, president of Doctors Nova Scotia, "which provided letters of support to organizations pushing for passage of the legislation. "Anything that can be done to educate parents and adults is critical."

The Canadian Cancer Society has estimated that 20% of children under the age of 12 are regularly exposed to second-hand smoke in cars.

The new law goes a long way to protecting young people, noted Pugsley. "Children don't often have a voice for themselves on health issues," he said, adding that cars are "an environment where they can't walk away."

Activists hope Wolfville's lead will quickly be followed by other communities across Canada. "It's important these precedents move forward," says Pugsley. — Donalee Moulton, Halifax, NS

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Wolfville, Nova Scotia, has followed the lead of several California municipalities and introduced a prohibition on smoking in automobiles when children under the age of 18 are present. The bylaw falls under the Municipal Government Act, under which the council can adopt law "respecting the health, well-being, safety and protection of persons; persons and activities in public places and places open to the public; and nuisances, including odours and fumes."