

# HEALTH

## Good News for Sickle Cell Sufferers

By Larry Lucas

A drug already in use for other diseases has been found highly effective in reducing painful crisis episodes in adults with sickle cell anemia.

Hydroxyurea, manufactured by Bristol-Myers Squibb, was given daily to volunteer patients in 21 medical centers across the country in a clinical trial. The study showed that the medicine cut painful episodes—and hospital admissions for those episodes—in half. Hydroxyurea also reduced by half the incidence of acute chest syndrome—a life-threatening complication whose symptoms include chest pain, fever and an abnormal chest x-ray.

The drug is not yet approved by the Food and Drug Administration, but because it is approved for other purposes, sickle cell patients can get it with a doctor's prescription.

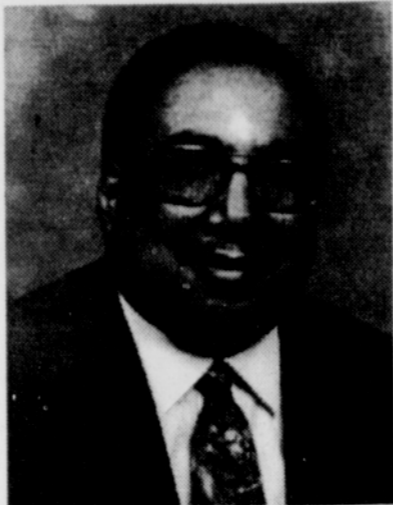
According to Dr. Claude L'Enfant of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, "This is a significant advance in the treatment of adults with sickle cell anemia.

Although it is not a cure, hydroxyurea therapy is the first effective treatment for this serious illness and may greatly improve the quality of life of sickle cell anemia patients."

Sickle cell anemia is an inherited disease most prevalent among people whose ancestors come from Africa, the Middle East, the Mediterranean area, and India. About 72,000 African Americans suffer from this disease—as well as a growing number of people of other races or of mixed race. In addition, one in 12 African Americans carries the sickle cell trait. If people with this trait marry, their children are likely to inherit the disease.

In patients with this disease, red blood cells take on a sickle shape and become rigid. Scientists think hydroxyurea prevents the cells from becoming rigid, reducing the pain as the sickle-shaped cells try to squeeze through tiny blood vessels.

This breakthrough illustrates how drug research can not only save and improve lives—it can



save healthcare dollars, too.

Each time a sickle cell patient has to go to a hospital or emergency room because of a pain crisis, it costs hundreds—often thousands—of dollars. Add that to the wages and productivity lost when sickle cell patients can't work because of pain episodes, and you have a whopping bill. This new drug, plus others still in testing for sickle disease, should cut this bill—and also cut the suffering of people with sickle cell disease.

Larry Lucas is Associate Vice President of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America in Washington, DC.

## Spring Cleaning For The Kidney Association Of Oregon

If unloading a used car is on your list of things to do for spring cleaning, the Kidney Association of Oregon (KAO) can help. Donate an unwanted vehicle to KAO and you'll be helping to fund the fight against kidney and urinary disease in Oregon. You may even qualify for a tax deduction.

The donation process is simple. Anyone interested in making a contribution should call (503) 228-1898 and talk to a KAO representative (collect calls will be accepted). You'll

be given instructions on where and when to drop-off your vehicle.

The Car Contribution Campaign is a hassle-free way for people to get rid of an unwanted automobile and help drive down the rate of kidney and urinary disease. Vehicles donated to KAO are sold at auction. Proceeds to support programs in research, patient services, organ donation, public information and professional education.

In the state of Oregon alone,

1,700 people are on dialysis and another 79 patients are waiting for kidney transplants. KAO is an affiliate of the National Kidney Foundation (NKF). The NKF helps more Americans prevent, treat and cure kidney and urinary disease than any other nonprofit health agency. The Foundation's ultimate goal is to take kidney disease from treatment to cure.

For more information or to donate your vehicle, call us collect at (503) 228-1898.

## Smokers Who Quit Smoking

Smokers who quit smoking -- even temporarily -- heal faster from wounds and surgery according to a study at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

The privately funded clinical study used nicotine patches to measure the difference in blood flow in people who underwent hand surgery. As a result, researchers have been able to learn more about how nicotine from inhaled smoke affects nerves and constricts blood vessels leading to the incision.

"Each time nicotine entered the nervous system, blood flow was restricted at the site of the surgery," said Dr. David Netscher, an associate professor of plastic surgery at Baylor. "The decrease in the amount

of blood that flowed to the incision area was significant."

Insufficient blood flow can cause the skin to slough, a term used for improper healing and eventual death of the tissue. A skin graft may be necessary, and in some plastic surgery procedures where large amounts of skin are involved, the procedure must be redone. In some general surgery cases, the incision may have to be sutured again.

However, the restrictive effects of smoking on blood flow are short-lived. A smoker who ceases smoking when a wound or incision is made will see the risks for complications drop significantly.

"There is always a slight risk for failure in any surgical procedure,"

said Netscher. "Previous studies have confirmed that among smokers the failure rate is two and sometimes even three times greater than in non-smokers."

The reduction in blood flow to the wound site can be as high as 30-percent in the first few minutes after nicotine has traveled through the nervous system. After smoking a cigarette it takes an average of 25 minutes for nerves that constrict blood vessels to return to normal.

"We are telling surgeons to advise their patients who smoke to cease the activity as close to the surgery date and as long after surgery as possible," Netscher said.

## Teen Line For Pregnancy Prevention

Oregon now has a statewide toll-free information line for teenagers in a strategy to prevent teen pregnancy.

Oregon SafeNet will provide information about sexuality, abstinence and referrals to health and birth control services. The number is 1-800-998-9825. Hours of operation will be Monday through Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

The information line is one of a number of broad-based strategies as outlined in former Gov. Barbara Roberts' comprehensive plan to cut the teen pregnancy rate in Oregon by half by the year 2000. Gov. John Kitzhaber has also indicated his strong support of this issue.

Sharon Kitzhaber, wife of the governor, has agreed to be a spokesperson for Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month and will champion Oregon's teen pregnancy prevention efforts.

"The most important thing we can do is to reach young teens so that they choose not to be sexually active, so that they do not get pregnant which robs them of their youth," Mrs. Kitzhaber said.

### WORLD WISE

## Teeth Reflect Cultural Tastes

News USA

(NU) - It's said that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. And that may explain why Americans like to see a full complement of bright white teeth, while just the opposite is true in other cultures.

The researchers at Rembrandt Oral Care Products looked into these cultural differences and discovered that, in some parts of the world, beauty really is more than skin deep.

- For instance:
  - Natives in remote Malaysia inlay their teeth with bits of brass, wire and semiprecious stones to enhance their beauty.
  - In Africa, members of some tribes remove one tooth or more for tribal identification.
  - In some mountain villages of Taiwan, the back teeth are extracted as a sign of beauty.
  - Many native populations of America stain their teeth for cosmetic purposes, just as their ancestors did. The practice began in 200-500 A.D.
  - Centuries ago, people in some regions of China covered their teeth with thin pieces of gold.
  - The Fulani of Sudan blacken their lips and surround their eyes with black pigment to emphasize the whiteness of their teeth.

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