

Recent Publications and Sources of Information

NIH guidelines for stem cell research

The US National Institutes of Health (NIH) has published its *Guidelines for Research Involving Human Pluripotent Stem Cells*. The Guidelines describe the documentation and assurances that must accompany requests for NIH funding for research using human pluripotent stem cells from human embryos or fetal tissue. They state specific criteria for informed consent and establish a review group to decide on compliance with the guidelines, thereby ensuring that NIH-funded research is conducted in an ethical and legal manner. Only cells derived from frozen embryos that were created for the purposes of fertility treatment and were in excess of clinical need may be utilized. The Guidelines prohibit the use of inducements for donation of an embryo. The Guidelines set out those areas where NIH will not provide funding, including research which creates or contributes to a human embryo, utilizes human pluripotent stem cells derived using somatic cell nuclear transfer, or those combined with an animal embryo.

Human pluripotent stem cells can give rise to many different types of cells, such as muscle, nerve, heart and blood cells. Research in this area could help scientists to generate cells and tissue for use in transplantation to treat many diseases or to improve understanding of the complex events that occur during normal human development and what causes diseases and conditions such as birth defects and cancer.

Guidelines for Research Involving Human Pluripotent Stem Cells. Federal Register, 25 August 2000.

Opioid control policy: self assessment guidelines

The purpose of these self-assessment guidelines is to encourage governments to achieve better pain management of cancer patients by identifying and overcoming regulatory barriers to opioid availability. The guidelines are intended for those who decide

national drug control policy and those who implement it. Balance is needed to prevent illegal trafficking and diversion of opioids, while ensuring availability for medical and scientific purposes.

Information is provided on the global problem of inadequate cancer pain relief and why opioids are needed. There are three barriers to adequate pain management: economic, medical and regulatory. While the Guidelines focus solely on regulatory issues, it is well understood that other barriers play major roles, such as the inappropriate prescribing of expensive medication which is ineffective in late-stage cancer.

Achieving balance in national opioid control policy: Guidelines for assessment. WHO/EDM/QSM/2000.4. Available from: Quality Assurance and Safety: Medicines, Essential Drugs and Medicines Policy, World Health Organization, Geneva.

Australian therapeutic guidelines on antimicrobials

The Eleventh edition of Therapeutic Guidelines: Antibiotics has now been published. The guidelines are endorsed by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the National Prescribing Service. They cover principles of antimicrobial use and contain in-depth information on infections and diseases and the way they should be treated. Adverse reactions, interactions and the dangers of resistance are set out in the appendices.

Therapeutic Guidelines: Antibiotics. Available from: Therapeutic Guidelines Ltd., Melbourne, Australia by e-mail: sales@tg.com.au or on <http://www.tg.com.au>

Reliable quality information and the Internet

Guidelines for medical and health information sites on the Internet have been published by the American Medical Association (AMA). Access to medical information through the Internet has the potential to

speed the transformation of the patient-physician relationship from that of a physician providing advice and treatment to that of shared decision making between patient and physician.

Barriers to the provision of independent information through the Internet include wide variations in quality of information, commercial interests which influence Web site content, and uncertain preservation of personal privacy. For example, insurers or employers could monitor what diseases Web users research.

To address these issues, the AMA has developed principles to guide development and posting of Internet content, govern acquisition of information and posting of online advertising and sponsorship, ensure site visitor and patient rights to privacy and confidentiality and provide effective and secure means of e-commerce. Although developed for the AMA Web sites, these principles may also be useful to other providers and users of medical information on the Internet.

Available from: Journal of the American Medical Association, 515 N State St. Chicago, IL60610, USA or <http://jama.ama-assn.org>.

Standards for Internet pharmacies

The Council of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society in the United Kingdom has published standards of good professional practice for those who wish to provide pharmaceutical services via the Internet. For some time the Council has been aware of the development of on-line pharmacy services and has been working to identify the specific issues such developments raise. The standards will be updated as required.

The standards deal with protection of the confidentiality and integrity of patient information and require that all information must be encrypted and comply with National Health Service security standards. Pharmacists providing on-line pharmacy services must advise patients to seek consultation whenever this is judged necessary. A questionnaire appropriate to the product must be completed and advice offered on all purchases. All information provided must comply with the marketing authorization, patient advertising leaflet and advertising regulations. A record should be kept of any recommendations made, and the pharmacy must retain records for two years of all purchasers and the medicines sold.

Standards for the provision of on-line pharmacy services. Available from: Royal Pharmaceutical Society, 1 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7JN, United Kingdom