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Boston University
Study confirms vitamin D deficiency as major health problem for elderly

A recent study confirms that vitamin D deficiency is a major health problem for the elderly, making them more susceptible to osteomalacia—adult rickets—and increasing their risk for hip fractures. The study, conducted by researchers from the School of Medicine and the Hebrew Rehabilitation Center for Aged (HRCA)/Harvard Research Nursing Home, found that nearly 80 percent of elderly residents living in a Boston-area long-term care facility suffer from some degree of vitamin D deficiency in the winter.

Researchers followed HRCA residents and “free-living” tenants at HRCA-sponsored apartment complexes over a one-year period, tracking their dietary intake of vitamin D and vitamin D production from sunlight exposure. Residents were allowed to consume as much milk as they wished and to receive as much sunlight as they could depending on their mobility. The researchers found both sets of seniors were likely to be vitamin D deficient when they relied solely on their dietary consumption for vitamin D.

Residents at the facility who were less mobile and received minimal sunlight exposure during the summer months did benefit from the exposure, but were still somewhat deficient. The more mobile, free-living tenants did receive adequate amounts of vitamin D through its production in the skin from sunlight. However, researchers found that both sets of elders who relied only on vitamin D production from sunlight exposure suffered from vitamin D deficiency by the end of the winter. Residents of both facilities who received vitamin D supplementation were not deficient.

According to Michael Holick, Ph.D., M.D., one of the authors of the study and the director of the Vitamin D, Skin and Bone Research Laboratory at BUSM, it was always suspected that vitamin D deficiency was a major problem for the elderly, but until now there was little evidence to support it. “This confirmation should concern all elderly people living in temperate climates—not just those in nursing homes—who, because of their advancing age, already suffer from a decrease in bone mass and are more susceptible to falls and fractures,” he said.

School of Medicine dean honored for achievement in hypertension research

Aram V. Chobanian, M.D., dean of the School of Medicine and founder of the School’s Whitaker Cardiovascular Institute, recently was presented with two prestigious awards—a National Award of Merit from the American Heart Association (AHA) and the Modern Medicine Distinguished Achievement Award—for his contributions to medicine. A co-recipient of the Modern Medicine Award was C. Everett Koop, M.D., the former surgeon general of the United States.

A professor of medicine and pharmacology, Chobanian is known internationally for his research on hypertension. He chaired the National Institutes of Health’s Joint National Committee on the Detection, Evaluation and Treatment of Hypertension—the "JNC-IV"—which helped change the way people think about the diagnosis and management of hypertension and
cardiovascular disease. He also has been appointed recently as chairman of the NIH's Task Force on Hypertension Research, which will develop recommendations regarding the direction of hypertension research in the 1990's.

Annas, Japanese group discuss brain death, organ transplants

A Japanese Ministry of Health delegation recently met with George J. Annas, J.D., M.P.H., the Edward Utley Professor of Health Law, to learn about the legal issues that brain death and organ transplantation have raised in the United States. Annas is the former principal member of the Task Force for the Determination of Brain Death in Children and the chairman of the Massachusetts Task Force on Organ Transplantation.

The meeting was one of several the delegation will make to gather information to help them resolve a major controversy currently in Japan involving issues related to brain death and organ transplantation. The delegation from the Japanese Provisional Commission for the Study on Brain Death and Organ Transplantation also will visit other sites in the United States, as well as in Europe, Asia and islands in the Pacific. The commission will submit its findings to the prime minister of Japan in two years.

BUSE hosts biotechnology workshop for high school science teachers

Fifteen Massachusetts high school teachers attended a three-week Summer Institute workshop at BUSM titled "Understanding Life at the Macromolecular Level." The purpose of the Summer Institute, which is part of BUSM's Program in Biomedical Laboratory and Clinical Sciences, is to teach high school science teachers about biotechnology, so they in turn can educate their students about the subject and interest them in pursuing careers in the biomedical field.

It is estimated that by the year 2000, Massachusetts could be home to 150 biotechnology firms, but that there will be a significant shortage of qualified scientists—especially those at the associate-degree and bachelor-degree level—to fill the needed positions. "Unfortunately, the skills needed for these positions have not been introduced to students during their high school years," said Connie Phillips, director of the School of Medicine's program.

The Summer Institute includes both didactic and laboratory experiences to train the high school teachers in contemporary biosciences. They also will learn exciting methods to bring the fundamentals of bioscience to a diverse student group and will be encouraged to create their own unique strategies to reach students.

The Summer Institute is sponsored in part by the Bay State Skills Corporation. The School of Medicine is one of only five institutions chosen to participate in this first Summer Institute on biotechnology. Through additional funding, the teacher-training program will continue at BUSM through the next two years.

Cancer Society 'seed' grants available through Cancer Research Center

The Medical Center's Hubert H. Humphrey Cancer Research Center has been awarded an Institutional Grant from the National Chapter of the American Cancer Society (ACS) to encourage young investigators (junior faculty, post-docs) to carry out cancer-related research. The primary purpose of the grant is to serve as "seed" money to permit initiation of promising new projects or novel ideas, that will serve as basis for future grant applications from other programs. The awards will vary according to the needs of the investigators and should not exceed $6,000. The majority of allocations will be made to persons who have not received prior grant support.

Applications will be awarded on a competitive basis and evaluated according to criteria described in the application forms. Application forms are available from the Cancer Research Center office, K701, 638-4173 (x4173).

The deadline for submitting applications is Oct. 1, 1990.

Skin-cancer screening draws large turnout from Medical Center community

A recent skin-cancer screen held at the Medical Center drew interest from 190 staff, employees and members of the community, according to Howard Koh, M.D., an associate professor of dermatology and public health.

BUMC was one of several sites in Massachusetts to offer the free skin-cancer screen during the late spring and early summer to more than 5,000 state residents, said Koh, a key coordinator of the statewide screenings and also an oncologist at UH. The BUMC clinic was sponsored and supported by the American Cancer Society, the American Academy of Dermatology, the teaching and clinical components of BUMC's Skin Oncology Program and the University Hospital's Department of Dermatology.

"All in all, we are happy with the turnout; the people who came to the clinic were very appreciative," said Koh.

Snider to be presented with award relating smoking and health

Gordon L. Snider, M.D., an associate professor of biochemistry and a professor of medicine, recently was honored as a co-recipient of the Fifth Annual Alton Ochsner Award Relating Smoking and Health. The $15,000 award was in recognition of Snider's 20 years of research into the causes of emphysema.

Snider's work involves studying the inhibitors of elastase, an enzyme that the lung produces in response to smoking that is capable of dissolving the lung's elastic tissue. An imbalance between elastase and the natural inhibitors that protect the lungs results in emphysema.

Snider, who is also chief of the Medical Service at the Boston Veterans Administration Medical Center, will be presented with
Former BUSM/Hadassah Medical School exchange students and the director of the exchange program at Hebrew University hosted a luncheon in honor of Edward Alexander, M.D., a professor of medicine, a research professor of physiology and associate director of the Program, and his wife, Lois Alexander, during their recent visit to Jerusalem. Pictured, from left, are Alexander; Eyal Bonen, Ofer Meron, Amitai Ziv and Ronen Jaffee, all former exchange students; and Alan Rubinow, M.D., director of exchange programs at Hadassah Medical School. (Photo courtesy of Edward Alexander, M.D.)

The award on Oct. 23, at the Annual Convocation of the American College of Chest Physicians in Toronto, Canada. The award, established in honor of Alton Ochsner, M.D., the first physician to perceive a direct correlation between smoking and lung cancer, is presented annually to one or more clinicians or basic scientific investigators for their significant research contributions concerning the relationship between tobacco consumption and health.

Rich selected to participate in Kellogg Fellowship Program

John A. Rich, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine and an attending physician at Boston City Hospital, was one of 49 Americans selected by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to participate in the Kellogg National Fellowship Program.

The purpose of the program, which began in 1980, is to help increase the number of capable leaders in the nation. The program is structured to increase the participants' skills and insights into areas outside their chosen disciplines so they can deal more creatively and effectively with society's complex problems.

Rich, who is an active member of several urban community organizations, said he would like to establish a community network to help black AIDS victims, as well as expand his current AIDS and substance-abuse research.

Manuel to head search for new NEJM editor

Barry M. Manuel, M.D., associate dean for continuing education and the president of the Massachusetts Medical Society, will head up the search committee to choose a new editor for the New England Journal of Medicine. Also serving on the committee will be: Henry Banks, M.D.; Eugene Braunwald, M.D.; Mary Jane England, M.D.; James B. Hanshaw, M.D.; Edward J. Huth, M.D.; Timothy Johnson, M.D.; Philip E. McCarthy, M.D.; James F. McDonough, M.D.; Robert G. Petersdorf, M.D.; John I. Sandson, M.D., dean emeritus of BUSM; and Samuel O. Thier, M.D.

The current editor, Arnold Relman, M.D., recently announced his intentions to retire July 1, 1991.

Stevens elected to post in northeast chapter of AMA

Phyllis Stevens, director of minority affairs, recently was elected vice chairperson of minority affairs of the American Medical Association’s Northeast Group on Student Affairs. After serving a two-year term as vice chairperson, Stevens will become chairperson.

Leach appointed editor of sports-medicine journal

Robert E. Leach, M.D., chairman of the Department of Orthopedic Surgery, recently was appointed as the editor of the American Journal of Sports Medicine during the annual meeting of the American Orthopedic Society for Sports Medicine. Leach will assume the post of editor in September 1990.

Founded 16 years ago, the journal goes to 10,700 sports-medicine physicians and orthopedic surgeons around the world.
Article by Tifft honored by cardiovascular journal

An article by Charles P. Tifft, M.D., an associate professor of medicine, recently was honored by the *Cardiovascular Reviews and Reports*. Titled "The Use of Beta-Adrenergic Blockers in Hypertensive Patients and Their Effects on the Cardiovascular Responses to Exercise and Stress," the article was selected as one in the journal's "Classics of the Decade Series." The article originally was published in 1981.

CME receives reaccreditation

The Department of Continuing Medical Education (CME) received reaccreditation for a full four years from the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) in June, according to Barry M. Manuel, M.D., associate dean for CME. The ACCME accredits the Department of CME to be a sponsor of continuing medical education for physicians and thereby allows the department to designate Category 1 credits.