

Separated twins beat the odds

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Bangladeshi conjoined twins Trishna and Krishna appeared on Sunday to have beaten the odds with their miracle story of survival, both awaking from landmark separation surgery happy and well.

As they faced the prospect of looking at each other face-to-face for the first time, the successful separation of the two-year-olds who were born joined at the head has been hailed as a medical triumph.

Their guardian Moira Kelly, who has cared for the girls since their arrival in Australia two years ago, said it was hoped that the children's cots could be brought together soon so they could touch each other.

"They're too weak to look at each other, they're too sleepy so we're not there for that yet, but we're early days and you know, take it day by day," said Kelly, from the Children First Foundation charity.

Krishna and Trishna, who turn three next month, were separated by a 16-member medical team on Tuesday and are recovering slowly from the 32-hour marathon surgery at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne.

Trishna woke up on Thursday but Krishna, the weaker of the pair, emerged fully from the medically induced coma on Saturday. Both appear to be neurologically sound.

"Krishna was on my lap and I said I wasn't going to move anywhere, and I had her on my lap for a couple of hours and it was the first time she'd ever been held on her own," Kelly said.

"I mean you can't even imagine -- any human being, you don't have to be a mother, just a human being to realize how special that was."

Trishna and Krishna were delivered to the Mother Teresa orphanage in Dhaka shortly after their birth. It was there that Australian



These photos taken in August show the Bangladeshi set of twins Trishna (left) and Krishna. (AFP/HO/File/Royal Childrens Hospital)

aid workers realized they faced certain death without help and began the process of bringing them to Australia for medical care.

When they arrived in Melbourne two years ago, the twins were gravely ill. They were nursed back to health and underwent a series of operations in preparation for the separation surgery.

Associate Professor Mark Gianoutsos, who runs the cranio facial unit at Sydney Children's Hospital, said Trishna and Krishna had overcome the odds many times in their short lives so far.

Only 22 cases such as theirs had been described in medical literature by 1987, each one uniquely complex.

"It's very rare. Twins joined at the head is the rarest of the conjoined twins. It's about one in two to two-and-a-half million live births," he told AFP.

Even then, about 30 percent of these twins do not live more than about a week due to organ failures and other complications, and of those who do survive, the majority are not suitable for surgical treatment.

Trishna and Krishna were particularly lucky in that the anatomy of the veins in their brains was favorable for their separation, he said.

Even so, doctors stressed that the chances of both twins surviving the marathon surgery without sustaining brain damage was only 25 percent.

The most dangerous phase of the treatment has passed but the girls face the risk of infection and their bodies must learn to operate independently after almost three years of sharing kidney, stomach and blood pressure systems.

"It's a very complex anatomical, physiological problem. It requires an awful lot of planning. Each of these cases is different as well," Gianoutsos told AFP.

"I think we would all congratulate the people involved in it," he said of the surgery. "It is a great triumph of planning and teamwork."

News of the twins' separation has travelled around the world, with the twins' biological mother telling AFP she was "overjoyed" that her girls were doing well.

"No mother in the world could be as proud as me. I always knew that they would get separated," said Lovely Mallick, 22.

Back in Melbourne, Moira Kelly said it was "a dream come true to think at the end of the week a mother knows, somewhere in Bangladesh, that her two little daughters... they're alive."

HEALTH TIP

When infants get diarrhea

Diarrhea in infants is common, often a quick bout caused by a virus. But in some cases among young children, diarrhea can quickly become dangerous, says the U.S. National Library of Medicine.

If you have a newborn younger than 3 months, call your child's pediatrician at the first sign of diarrhea, the agency advises.

In any child, bloody diarrhea or a case that lasts longer than two days also should prompt a call to the doctor.

While your child has diarrhea, make sure he or she drinks lots of fluids. A drink that contains electrolytes is best to help prevent dehydration. For young infants, continue nursing, and ask your doctor about giving extra fluids.

(Source: HealthDay News)

Migraine

increases likelihood of stroke

People who suffer migraines have more than double the risk of ischemic stroke, and the risk is especially high in women, a new study has found.

Ischemic stroke, the most common type of stroke, occurs when blood supply to the brain is cut off by plaque accumulation or a blood clot.

In this study, researchers from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine reviewed the findings of 21 studies that included a total of 622,381 men and women, aged 18 to 70, in Europe and North America. Those with migraines were 2.3 times more likely than people without migraines to suffer ischemic stroke. The risk was 2.5 times higher for migraine sufferers who experienced aura (visual disturbances such as flashing lights, zigzag lines and blurred vision), and for women experiencing aura, 2.9 times higher.

The findings reinforce the link between migraine and stroke and also correct some discrepancies in previous analyses that yielded mixed results, according to Hopkins cardiologist and senior study investigator Dr. Saman Nazarian.

Nazarian said nearly 1,800 articles have been written about the relationship between migraine and stroke, but the Hopkins review is believed to be the largest of its kind and was more selective, including only studies that used similar designs and groups of people.

"Identifying people at highest risk is crucial to preventing disabling strokes.

Based on this data, physicians should consider addressing stroke risk factors in patients with a history or signs of light flashes and blurry vision associated with severe headaches," Nazarian said in a Hopkins news release.

There are a number of migraine prevention and treatment options, including smoking cessation, taking medications to lower blood pressure or taking blood-thinning drugs such as aspirin, Nazarian added.

For women with migraines, additional options include discontinuing use of birth control pills or stopping hormone replacement therapy.

(Source: HealthDay News)



Swine flu vaccine effective despite mutations: experts

PARIS (AFP) — Swine flu vaccines are still effective despite reported cases of mutations in the A(H1N1) virus, health experts in Europe and North America said on Saturday.

Bruno Lina, director of the national flu virus monitoring center for southern France, said the mutation of the virus -- blamed for around 6,750 deaths so far worldwide -- came as no surprise.

"It was expected, it was announced, and it will happen again," Lina told AFP, adding: "That does not change anything with regard to treatment and vaccines."

In the United States, Anne Schuchat of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) said the mutation would have no impact on the effectiveness of the swine flu vaccine or the anti-virals.

The experts' comments came a day after the World Health Organization announced that a mutation had been found in swine flu virus samples taken following the first two deaths from the pandemic in Norway.

However, the Geneva-based UN agency stressed that the mutation did not appear to cause a more contagious or more dangerous form of A(H1N1).

It also revealed that a similar mutation had been observed in Brazil, China, Japan, Mexico, Ukraine and the United States as early as April.

The WHO underlined that there was no evidence of more infections or more deaths as a result, while antivirals used to treat severe flu -- oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza) -- are effective on the mutated virus.

"Studies show that currently available pandemic vaccines confer protection," it added, as mass vaccine campaigns slowly gain ground in the northern hemisphere.

France's health chief, Didier Houssin, said in a radio interview that the ability of the vaccine to induce an immune reaction is not affected by the mutation, "so the vaccines remain effective".

He added that in anticipation of a mutation, "a certain number of our vaccines are vaccines with an additive," which expands the range of effectiveness in being able to act against a slightly modified virus.

Scientists are nevertheless concerned that mutations in flu viruses could cause a more virulent and deadly pandemic flu.

In the cases observed in Norway, the mutation could potentially allow the virus to latch onto the pulmonary cells -- that is, deep inside the lungs, which is generally considered a more dangerous form.

"At the moment we are purely at a descriptive stage," Lina said.

"It will have to be verified if these viruses have acquired a particular characteristic which could potentially make them more likely and more easily to take a pulmonary form."

On Friday, World Health Organization data showed that around 6,750 people had died from swine flu since the virus was first uncovered in Mexico and the United States in April.

Meditation eases heart disease

Heart disease patients who practice Transcendental Meditation have reduced death rates, U.S. researchers have said.

At a meeting of the American Heart Association they said they randomly assigned 201 African Americans to meditate or to make lifestyle changes.

After nine years, the meditation group had a 47% reduction in deaths, heart attacks and strokes.

The research was carried out by the Medical College in Wisconsin with the Maharishi University in Iowa.

It was funded by a £2.3m grant from the National Institutes of Health and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

The African American men and women had an average age of 59 years and narrowing of the arteries in their hearts.

The meditation group practiced for 20 minutes twice a day.

The lifestyle change group received education classes in traditional risk factors, including dietary modification and exercise.

As well as the reductions in death, heart attacks and strokes in the meditating group, there was a clinically significant drop (5mm Hg) in blood pressure.

And a significant reduction in psychological stress in some



are derived from the body's own internal pharmacy stimulated by the Transcendental Meditation practice."

Ingrid Collins, a consultant educational psychologist at the London Medical Center, said: "I'm not at all surprised that a change of behavior like this can have enormous benefits both emotionally and physically.

"Physical and emotional energy is on a continuum and whatever happens to us physically can effect our emotions and vice versa."

(Source: BBC)

Patients happier when docs discuss side effects

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Hospital patients who suffer a side effect from treatment are more likely to give high ratings to their quality of care when hospital staff are up front about what went wrong, a new study suggests.

In a survey of nearly 2,300 patients treated at 16 Massachusetts hospitals, researchers found that 603 had some sort of "adverse event" -- most often side effects from a newly prescribed drug or complications from surgery -- during their hospitalization.

When asked whether hospital staff had explained the problem to them, only 40 percent of patients said they had.

Yet, when staff did discuss the problem, patients were more likely to be happy with their care -- even when the adverse effect was a preventable one, the study found.

"Our findings show that disclosure is associated with patients' perception of higher-quality care, even when they were harmed by an adverse event," lead researcher Dr. Lenny Lopez, of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, said in a statement.

"We believe this is the first study to address how disclosure affects the quality-of-care impression in patients who actually were harmed during the course of their treatment and may reassure physicians and others who worry about the consequences of disclosure," he added.

Using hospital records and patient interviews, the researchers found that almost one-third of adverse events in the study were preventable -- being related to errors such as giving patients the wrong dose of medication.

Hospital staff were less likely to discuss preventable adverse events with patients compared with ones that could not be avoided -- such as an unforeseeable reaction to a new drug. When patients suffered a preventable effect, staff explained the problem to them only 30 percent of the time, Lopez's team found.



Yet, patients tended to give their care higher quality ratings when a problem was explained to them, even when the complication was preventable.

On average, study patients rated their hospital care as "very good." But patients who'd discussed their adverse event with hospital staff were twice as likely to give high ratings as those who had been given no explanation.

"It's quite notable that high-quality ratings continued to be associated with disclosure even when the event was determined to be preventable," Lopez said.

The findings, according to Lopez, suggest that hospitals should not be afraid to disclose the reasons for patients' adverse events, even if they did arise from error.

"Although rates of disclosure remain disappointingly low," he said, "our findings should encourage more disclosure and allay fears of malpractice lawsuits."

"Patients want to be told the truth," Lopez added, "and they perceive disclosure as integral to high-quality medical care."

Lopez and his colleagues report their findings in the Archives of Internal Medicine.

In a separate study published in the same journal, researchers focused on diagnostic errors by physicians. They found that among 300 doctors at 22 U.S. hospitals, the most commonly missed or delayed diagnoses were pulmonary embolism (a blood clot in the lungs), drug reactions and overdoses, heart attacks and lung, colon and breast cancers.

On average, the doctors described committing or witnessing two such errors in their careers. The fact that they readily recalled the details of these cases suggests that "diagnostic error is not unusual in clinical practice," the researchers write, "and actively soliciting such cases represents an opportunity for tapping into a hidden cache of medical errors that are not generally collected by existing error surveillance and reporting systems."