

BEWARE

A Bi-monthly Newsletter of CUTS Safety Watch



No. 5/2005

कट्स ✕ CUTS

World Trauma Day

Observing certain days with special titles makes people think about the significance of the issue. World Trauma Day – observed on October 17 – was thus aimed to reiterate the importance of effective pre-hospital care.

According to accident statistics in India, an average of 1.2 million accidents take place annually. With the given condition of roads coupled with increasing vehicular population, surviving an accident is considered lucky. After surviving a mishap, comes the question of pre-hospital care. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), at least 50 percent of road fatalities in low and middle-income group countries could have been averted with timely medical intervention. However, the best intentions of helping out an accident victim may result in disaster due to lack of knowledge in handling emergency cases. Herein comes the premise of an organised pre-hospital care system. Pre-hospital care can be conceptualised as the treatment given to a victim at the site of an accident or before the victim is admitted to a hospital. This period is critical for survival. Prompt medical

attention can prove life-saving in a number of cases. Pre-hospital care has been near perfected in the West with paramedical experts who have well-equipped ambulances.

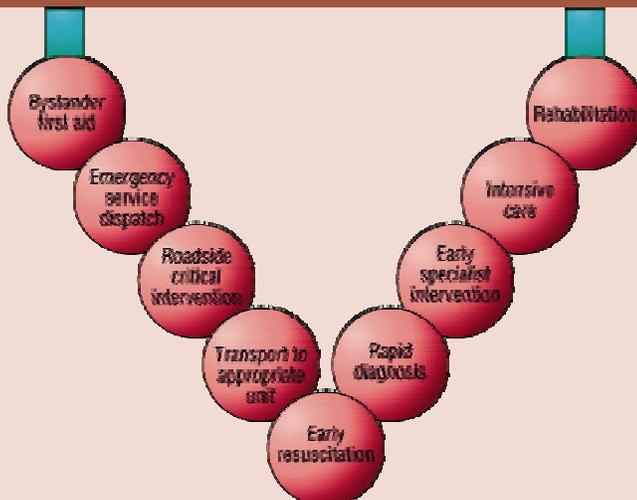


The basic needs for pre-hospital care include well-equipped ambulances and trained paramedical staff. The Government of India has set up Emergency Accident Relief Centres that provide ambulances, but there is a dearth of trained staff. The basic knowledge required for immediate first aid includes the ability to assess the situation, resuscitation methods, basic life support and transportation methods.

This is a phase that every developing country goes through. A tendency to emulate the West triggers the process of advancement but without adequate complementary services. Wider roads and flyovers lead to an increase in the number of vehicles and speed. The situation warrants an effective pre-hospital care system that should be the initiative of the government. Other details also need to be addressed.

The hospitals, which would deal with these cases have to adhere to certain standards. Complexities arising out of legal consequences and the expenses of treatment have to be taken into account at least in the initial stages. Countries like Austria carry out pre-hospital care training courses so that bystanders can help accident victims in the first ten minutes. Hoping for something like that would be unrealistic in the Indian scenario. A small but significant first step would be to have trained paramedical staff with the necessary equipment who can reach the accident spot during the critical period.

Trauma Chain of Care for Road Traffic Casualties



IN THIS ISSUE

- Dental Distress2
- French Fries2
- Medicines Harmful3
- Obesity to Cancer3



Consumer Unity & Trust Society

Email: cutsca@vsnl.com / calcutta@cuts.org
 Website: www.cuts-international.org

Subscription Rs. 50 per annum

Dental Distress

Nutritionists would generally favour a switch to bottled water from sugary soft drinks which seems to be the fashion even amongst teenagers. The bad news is that according to the World Dental Congress, bottled water does not contain enough fluoride to protect teeth from decay.

After analysing 27 brands of bottled water, they confirmed that fluoride levels were in some cases less than half of the amount found in tap water. The findings are not new. Five years back, a study in Cleveland, US, claimed that 95 percent of bottled brands fell below the state guidelines of fluoride levels.

(www.consumeraffairs.com)



deaths caused every day due to food and water borne diseases.

(www.fao.org)

Mission Arsenic

The West Bengal Government has unveiled a master plan that aims to provide safe drinking water to people in arsenic affected areas. The cost of such an effort will be around Rs 2000cr and the concerned department expects to receive 75 percent of the funds from the Centre.

The plan in-volves providing safe drinking water to 8,153 inhabitants in 3,319 villages covering 443 districts where arsenic contamination is a serious issue. The problem is to be tackled in three ways: by providing drinking water from other rivers; by installing ground water arsenic treatment plants, and by providing better drinking water from deeper underground levels.



(ET, 25.10.05)

Of Fruits and Pesticides

According to the UK-based Soil Association, pesticide levels in fruits distributed to children by the UK health department are 25 percent more than levels in fruits on sale in shops. 167 samples of fruits and vegetables supplied to schools under a programme that entitles



school children between four to six years to a piece of fruit free everyday. Results showed that residue was present in 84 percent of the samples compared to 57 percent found in those selling in shops.

The findings are cause for concern as studies indicate that pesticides may cause hormonal changes during the development period. Moreover, pesticides disturb the functioning of the endocrine glands which control vital metabolic activity.

(DTE, 31.10.05)

French Fries

A lawsuit has been filed in a Los Angeles Superior Court in the US demanding warning labels on packets of French fries and potato chips believed to contain high amounts of the chemical acrylamide. Acrylamide is a carcinogenic chemical formed when starchy food is cooked at high temperatures.



California attorney general Bill Lockyer filed the lawsuit and claimed that consumers should have information to make informed choices about the food they consume. The industry however claimed that the lawsuit was misleading since it gave the idea that the food cooked at home is not harmful. Scientists in Sweden first discovered that food was a source of acrylamide in 2002. Since then various health agencies have studied the issue but have not yet found any conclusive evidence.

(DTE, 30.09.05)

Africa Meet

The importance of eliminating food-borne diseases was highlighted in the first ever Regional Food Safety Conference in Africa. The four-day meet held under the auspices of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO), was attended by 200 food safety officials and experts from 50 countries.

The meet focussed on ways of strengthening the existing system to ensure safer food. Improved food safety is expected to reduce the 2000

GOOD FOOD

Yoghurt: Tennessee researchers claim that yoghurt is the perfect food to initiate weight loss. The study was designed to study anti-obesity potential from increased dietary calcium. Two groups of participants were put on a yoghurt diet and another calcium supplement diet for 12 weeks. Fat loss was significantly more in the group put on yoghurt.



Mushrooms: Mushrooms have been identified as a prime natural source of an antioxidant that can reduce the risk of chronic diseases. The antioxidant ergothioneine is most abundantly present in the commonly consumed mushrooms, portabellas and criminis. The antioxidant does not get diminished when mushrooms are cooked. These are the findings by Joy Dubost, a doctoral candidate in food science and other food scientists from Pennsylvania.



(ET, 02.09.05)

Cabbages: Eating this leafy vegetable at least once a week is good for people with a certain genetic make up. The findings are from a study by the International Agency for Cancer Research, Lyon. For people with the specified genetic character, cabbages and other cruciferous vegetables can reduce the risk of lung cancer.



(ET, 28.10.05)

Chemical Migration

The Food Standards Agency (FSA), UK aims to reduce to consumers the danger from chemical contamination of food. It is studying the migration of chemicals from materials and articles in contact with food or drink.

The research on migration of chemicals will provide an evidence base for advice to consumers, enforcement authorities and the food industry. Controls on chemical migration of food are increasingly being made across the European Union (EU).

Research has already been completed on various themes including: investigating factors that influence chemical migration from packaging, developing test methods and testing materials used in food contact applications.

(www.food.gov.uk)

Patient Care

Voluntary Organisation in Interest of Consumer Education (VOICE) has launched a nation wide campaign to educate and empower patients to make choices in deciding the equipment to be used on them during medical procedures.



The programme, 'Patients First' was launched on October 18. The campaign also seeks to persuade the Government to guarantee compensation for improper health service from the health care provider without legal complications. The effort is a much-needed move in the right direction.

(TH, 19.10.05)

Medicines Harmful

The Health Ministry's National Commission of Macroeconomics and Health has termed many popular allopathic medications "irrational, useless and needless". The drugs could also have harmful effects depending on what other medication an individual is on.

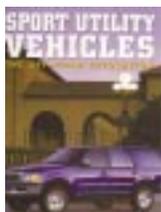


The Commission also put Ayurveda, Unani and Siddha formulations under the scanner following recent international reports claiming that they contain high levels of heavy metal. From January 01, 2006, herbal formulations have to conform to the specifications laid down under Schedule E of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act of India (DCAI). It is a long overdue move and one appreciable as the DCAI was in immediate need of an overhaul.

(Tol, 27.10.05)

Warnings on SUVs

Sports utility vehicles (SUVs) should carry health warnings because of their risk to pedestrians, according to the British Medical Journal. The journal points out that the risk of fatality when a SUV collides with a pedestrian is nearly twice that of a collision with a passenger car.



This high risk is because of the higher bonnet of the SUVs, which imply that key organs of the upper

body are more likely to be hit. SUVs also pose a danger to children especially while reversing when the driver cannot see out of the high back window.

The journal calls for manufacturers and distributors of SUVs to display warning notices on the cars to warn customers of the potential harm.

(BL, 06.10.05)

Safety and the Two-Wheeler

Honda unveiled the first airbag system to be mounted on motorcycles. The airbag module is built between the bike's handles and activates in case of a collision. The company announced that the airbag would be effective in significantly reducing fatalities.

In India, in an effort to implement the helmet law, the Centre is making it compulsory for two-



wheeler manufacturers to offer at least one ISI marked helmet with every vehicle they sell. The move is, however, being resisted by the manufacturers primarily because of the cost pressures of such a move.

(Reuters, 08.09.05; Tol, 05.09.05)

Child Safety Centre

The fourth Child Safety Centre in Dube, Soweto, South Africa was officially opened on September 16, 2005. The centre will focus on teaching children safety education, what to do in an emergency, the dangers of fire and electricity and road safety rules. At the child protection

unit, children would also be taught about issues such as child abuse.

The Centre also has a swimming pool and lessons in swimming will be imparted to the children. Nongezo Mekgwe, Director of Proactive Services revealed that their unit wanted to ensure that children became safety ambassadors who could further teach their parents and friends. The focus is not only children. Child minders would also be educated on how to take care of children they look after and what to do in case of an emergency. There were plans to open more such centres in the near future.

(www.joburg.org.za)

Obesity to Cancer

Tenovus, a cancer charity in Britain warns that half of Britain's obese teenagers could end up with cancer in the next 15 years.

Tenovus launched a campaign, 'You or Me – Cancer: a challenge for all of us', aiming to make parents improve their children's diet and exercise regime. It cautioned though, that crash dieting was not the solution and the challenge was to eliminate junk food from children's diets.



According to the British Medical Association, 22 and 28 percent of British boys and girls respectively were either overweight or obese.

(ET, 08.09.05)

Getting Tough on Safety

Getting Tough on Safety

From October 01, 2005 a new product safety regime took effect in the UK. Under the new regime, manufacturers and distributors of consumer products face much stricter and more public obligations.



Some companies have already incorporated the new rules, which in certain parts go beyond the measures outlined by the original EU directive passed 18 months back. It is applicable to all consumer products except food. One of the major changes is notification. The new regime requires notification to the concerned authorities immediately if the manufacturer or distributor has a product in the market that has some safety risk attached to it. Failure to do so could lead to fines equivalent to US\$8,800 and penalties are applicable to managers, directors or corporate officials.

Authorities will also have broader powers to initiate and oversee recalls and investigate suspected breaches of the new rules. Consumers stand to benefit from this move, as products with more risk will henceforth be easily visible.

(FT, 29.09.05)

Safety Watch in Action

Release of Report on Medicine Pricing

Reflecting concerns on the impact of high and rising prices of medicines, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Health Action International (HAI) have jointly developed a methodology for simple and reliable measurement of the retail price of selected medicines. Following the methodology, CUTS CRC has conducted a survey in seven districts of Kolkata in association with another West Bengal-based NGO, Community Development Medicinal Unit (CDMU).

The survey report 'Medicine Prices and Affordability in West Bengal', was released by Dr. Jayashree Mitra, Director of Medical Education, Government of West Bengal on October 01, 2005. Co-authors of the report and experts on the subject like Dr Santanu Tripathi Vice-Principal and Superintendent, S S K M Hospital, Kolkata, Dr Abhijit Hazra, Lecturer in Pharmacology, Institute of Post Graduate Medical Education & Research, Kolkata were present at the book-release programme.

Workshop on Rational Use of Drugs

CUTS CRC organised a one-day 'Training of Trainers workshop' on October 01, at Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta as part of their ongoing project on Rational Use of Drugs.

The workshop was attended by civil society organisations (CSO), pharmacists, and doctors from different districts of the state. The objective of this workshop was to develop community trainers who could take the message of rational drug use further down the



ladder.

The programme received encouraging response from the participants. The resource persons included doctors and members of the State Pharmacy Council who elucidated on the topic. The programme ended with a lively interactive session.

Feedback



Advisory Board

Dinesh Mohan (Chairperson)
Coordinator, Transportation Research & Injury Prevention Programme, IIT, New Delhi

Indira Chakravarty
Director & Professor, All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Kolkata

P Bhattacharya
Director, Administrative Training Institute, Kolkata

Pradeep S Mehta
Secretary General, CUTS International, Jaipur

R Desikan
Convener, Consumers Association of India, Chennai

Ravi Agarwal
Director, Toxics Link, New Delhi

Swarn Kohli
President, Consumer Education & Research Centre (CERC), Ahmedabad

S K Khanna
Consultant, Food Toxicologists, Lucknow

Udayan Nambodiri
Senior Editor, The Pioneer, New Delhi

SOURCES

BL: The Hindu Business Line, DTE: Down To Earth; ET: The Economic Times, FT: The Financial Times; TH: The Hindu, Tol: The Times of India

Published by Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS), 3-B, Camac Street, Kolkata 700016, India, Ph: 91.33.2227 4987 / 2229 7391, Telefax: 91.33.2227 4985, Email: cutsca@vsnl.com, calcutta@cuts.org, Website: www.cuts-international.org. CUTS offices also at Jaipur, Chittorgarh and New Delhi (India); Lusaka (Zambia); Nairobi (Kenya); and London (UK).

The news/stories in this Newsletter are compressed from several newspapers. The sources given are to be used as a reference for further information and do not indicate the literal transcript of a particular news/story.