

# News from here and there

## World Medical Association publishes the Revised Declaration of Helsinki

On 19 October 2013, after a revision process lasting 2 years, delegates at the World Medical Association's (WMA) annual assembly in Fortaleza, Brazil, overwhelmingly voted to support changes to the Declaration of Helsinki. The Declaration of Helsinki is an important landmark in setting standards for ethical research. It has been developed by the WMA as a statement of ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects, including research on identifiable human material and data.

The Declaration of Helsinki was first adopted by the 18th WMA general assembly during its meeting in Helsinki in June 1964, and has since been amended eight more times. Its most current revision is the only official one and can be accessed at <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1760318>.

The guidelines are consulted by ethics review committees, funders, researchers and research participants; they have been incorporated into national legislation; and are routinely used to ascertain the ethical appropriateness of clinical trials. However, the guidelines are not legally binding for countries, industry or individuals. For example, the US Food and Drug Administration stopped referring to them in its policies in 2008 because of disagreements over whether trials could ethically include placebos.

For the first time, the guidelines require that 'appropriate compensation and treatment for subjects who are harmed as a result of participating in research must be ensured'. They also require that trials be registered before recruitment begins, and that 'researchers have a duty to make publicly available the results of their research on human subjects', including negative results.

Dr Margaret Mungherera, President of the WMA, stated that the changes agreed were all about providing a greater degree of protection for those involved in research. She added that they had spent 2 years consulting their national medical association members, outside experts and the public, and were satisfied that the Declaration now required greater transparency about medical research, greater accountability and increased patient safety. The changes also placed more obligations on the sponsors of research, on the researchers themselves and on host governments to protect research subjects.

In an editorial published in *JAMA* (2013;310:2143–4), Dr Ezekiel Emanuel, former chief bioethicist at the National Institutes of Health, and his co-authors acknowledged that there was 'much too praise' for the new version, but noted several flaws including that 'the revised declaration's treatment of informed consent remains inadequate'.

P.M. NISCHAL, *Bengaluru, Karnataka*

## The Accelerating Science Award Program 2013

The Accelerating Science Award Program (ASAP) sponsored by 27 organizations including Google, Public Library of Science (PLOS) and the Wellcome Trust recognizes individuals who have applied scientific research published through 'open access' to innovate in any field and benefit society. Three recipients were

awarded the ASAP 2013 (US\$ 30 000 each) at the Open Access Week kickoff event hosted by the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) and the World Bank at Washington, DC on 21 October 2013 (<http://www.plos.org/plos-announces-finalists-for-the-accelerating-science-award-program-2/>).

Matthew Todd, who leads the Open Source Malaria Consortium, received the award for Global Collaboration to Fight Malaria for turning publicly available data into a global effort to aid new anti-malaria drug discovery. He created a global open-source collaboration involving scientists, college students and others who use open online laboratory notebooks in which their experimental data are posted each day, facilitating instant sharing and the ability to build on others' findings in almost real time.

The team lead by Dr Nitika Pant Pai and medical staff at McGill University and McGill University Health Centre, Montreal received the award for developing an innovative self-test screening strategy for the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Dr Pai's team developed a personalized smartphone application (app) on the basis of original research published in multiple open access journals to help circumvent the social visibility associated with HIV testing in a healthcare facility. This app allows individuals to be tested in the privacy of their own home. It guides HIV self-testing synergizing an online test to determine the level of risk of HIV, instructions to self-testing using a oral fluid-based self-test and interpreting the results, and confidential linkages and resources for referrals to trained counsellors.

Daniel Mietchen and his group received the award for making understanding easier by providing access to good quality multimedia files. Mietchen's group had created the Open Access Media Importer (OAMI), a bot that can find and download supplementary multimedia files from reusable licensed open access research articles deposited in PubMed Central. It then uploads them to Wikimedia Commons, the media repository used by the Wikipedias and their sister projects allowing people to play around with scientific materials and to engage with scientific processes.

ALLADI MOHAN, *Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh*

## Blood glucose test strips costing under ₹5 on the anvil

The high cost of currently available blood glucose test strips (₹30–₹40 each) is a deterrent in implementing self-monitoring of blood glucose for many persons living with diabetes mellitus in India. An economical version of such strips that may cost between ₹3 and ₹5 is being developed by various organizations in India such as Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Hyderabad; Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur; Christian Medical College, Vellore with the help of the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR). It was announced in November 2013 that different prototypes of such strips are being developed and tested before their formal launch in the market. These include strips that are used with glucometers, as well as those with calibrations on them which can be used without a glucometer.

With India on the verge of becoming the diabetes capital of the world, such a strip would be in much need to combat the disease.

ALLADI MOHAN, *Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh*

### **Indian American nominated to be the US Surgeon General**

On 14 November 2013, President Barack Obama of the USA nominated Dr Vivek Hallegere Murthy to be the next (19th) Surgeon General of the country. Dr Murthy is of Indian descent, born in England to parents from Karnataka, India, who migrated to the USA when he was 3 years old. Following his schooling in Miami, he graduated *magna cum laude* from Harvard University in just 3 years, with a bachelor's degree in biochemical sciences. He then followed in his father's footsteps by opting to be a physician. He received combined degrees in medicine and business administration from Yale University in 2003, and went on to complete an internal medicine residency at Harvard. He currently works as a hospitalist in Brigham and Women's hospital in Boston, Massachusetts and as an instructor at Harvard Medical School.

Dr Murthy has been an advocate of President Obama for many years. He was active in promoting Obama's candidacy for presidency, as part of the group, 'Doctors for Obama'. Dr Murthy is also the President and co-founder of 'Doctors for America', an organization of over 15 000 doctors and medical students nationwide, which has been a strong advocate of the President's affordable care act (Obamacare), both before and after its passage. In 2011, Dr Murthy was appointed by President Obama as a member of the Presidential Advisory Council on Prevention,

Health Promotion, and Integrative and Public Health within the Department of Health and Human Services. The group advises the National Prevention Council on developing strategies and partnerships to advance the nation's health. Dr Murthy has many other accomplishments to his credit. As an undergraduate, in 1995, he co-founded a non-profit organization, Visions Worldwide, focused on HIV prevention and AIDS education in both India and the USA. In 2007, he founded a collaborative networking web platform (Epernicus) for scientists to boost research productivity. This company has evolved to 'TrialNetworks', a cloud-based Clinical Trial Optimization System for pharmaceutical and biotechnology trials that improves the quality and efficiency of clinical trials to bring new drugs to market faster and more safely.

The Surgeon General, largely seen as a figurative post, is 'America's doctor' and represents the Health and Human Services Secretary in addressing public health practice. The President of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPIO), Dr J.B. Shah stated that the nomination of Dr Vivek Murthy as the US Surgeon General cemented the reputation physicians of Indian origin had across America. Dr Murthy awaits confirmation by the US Senate, which is not a given, especially in the face of stiff Republican opposition to Obamacare. If confirmed, he would both be the first Indian to occupy this post, as well as the youngest ever Surgeon General at 36 years of age. In 2009, the President had considered nominating another physician of Indian origin, Dr Sanjay Gupta (recognized for his role as CNN's chief medical correspondent), to the post, but Dr Gupta had declined the offer for reasons of family and career in surgery.

HARESH MANI, *Virginia, USA*

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