

# Abstracts

## *A vaccine for high blood pressure*

For all the success of medication against high blood pressure, only about one-third of patients in the USA successfully control their blood pressure using medication. This is not simply because they are not being diagnosed and treated; those who are on treatment often do not take their medication correctly – the treatment has side-effects and people don't feel sick with hypertension.

The idea behind a vaccination is that active immunisation to induce antibodies against angiotensin – known to raise blood pressure through the renin-angiotensin system – could simplify treatment. This study, by Alain Tissot and colleagues, investigated the safety and efficacy of CYT006-AngQb, a vaccine-based virus-like particle that targets angiotensin type II to reduce blood pressure. The trial took place in a number of centres, enrolling 72 patients with mild to moderate

hypertension, who were randomised to receive either subcutaneous injections of either 100 µg or 300 µg CYT006-AngQb or placebo. As far as safety was concerned, no serious adverse events that were treatment related were reported. The 300 µg dose of CYT006-AngQb reduced blood pressure in patients with mild to moderate hypertension during the daytime, particularly in the early morning.

Tissot AC, *et al. Lancet* 2008; 371: 821-827.

## *Acupuncture improves fertility rates in in vitro fertilisation*

For the 10 - 15% of couples who have difficulty conceiving, *in vitro* fertilisation is a commonly used option. However, the process is complex, involving a cycle of several procedures, generally over the course of 2 weeks. Success rates are relatively low and new drugs and technologies are

constantly being developed to improve the chances of conception – but unfortunately progress has been limited.

Acupuncture has been used in China for centuries to regulate women's reproductive systems. There are three proposed mechanisms for its effects on fertility: it may mediate the release of neurotransmitters, which can stimulate the release of gonadotrophin-releasing hormone; it may stimulate blood flow to the uterus by inhibiting uterine central sympathetic nerve activity; and it may stimulate the production of endogenous opioids, which could reduce stress. In this study, Eric Manheimer and colleagues looked at whether or not adjuvant acupuncture improved pregnancy rates when used with embryo transfer in women undergoing *in vitro* fertilisation.

They searched the literature for studies of randomised controlled trials that compared needle acupuncture given within 1 day of embryo transfer with sham acupuncture with no adjuvant treatment.

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## Abstract

Seven trials of 1 366 women undergoing *in vitro* fertilisation were included in the analysis. They found that using acupuncture to complement embryo transfer improved rates of pregnancy and live birth among women undergoing *in vitro* fertilisation.

Manheimer E, *et al. BMJ* 2008; 336: 545-549.

### *Cash transfers and child health*

Cash 'handouts' to poor people are a contentious issue. The proposed basic income grant (BIG) in South Africa has come in for a lot of opposition, mainly from people who believe that handouts increase dependency and do nothing to stimulate entrepreneurship. While this may be the case in some instances, a recent publication in *The Lancet* suggests that, in the programme in Mexico at least, cash injections have made a major difference to child health outcomes among poor people.

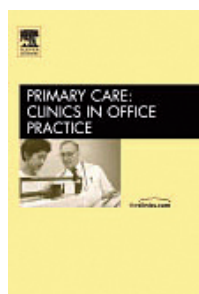
In fact, across the developing world, many governments have introduced conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes with the goal of improving options for poor families through interventions in health, nutrition and education. This is particularly the case in Latin America. In traditional cash transfer programmes, families receive cash benefits because they fall below a certain cut-off income or live within a geographically targeted area. However, a CCT brings, with the cash, conditions – the families only receive the money if they comply with certain requirements, such as mandatory attendance at preventive health-care facilities and health and nutrition sessions aimed at promoting behavioural change. Some programmes require school attendance by school-age children. The idea is not simply to provide cash; it is to provide education and a gradual change in lifestyle, investing in human capital in order to bring about long-term changes in economic circumstances.

This study aimed to separate out the benefits of the actual cash involved with the other benefits of the programme in terms of education and health. The authors used an intervention that began in Mexico in 1998, among low-income families who were randomly assigned to be enrolled in CCT programmes. In 2003, children who had been on the programme their entire lives were assessed for a variety of outcomes. What researchers found was that a doubling of cash transfers improved children's height and that fewer children were stunted. And fewer children became overweight – a problem among the poor in Mexico. A doubling of cash transfers was also associated with improved motor, language and cognitive development.

The message is clear: increase the amount of cash a family has, independently of any other intervention, and you have better child health.

Fernald LCH, *et al. Lancet* 2008; 371: 828-837.

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