

Discarded heroin syringes are stuck into a banana tree after they were used by addicts in Hanoi, Vietnam. Some of the syringes are reused by poorer addicts. The estimated number of adolescents dying of AIDS in the Asia Pacific region has more than doubled since 2005, experts said recently, warning of a "hidden epidemic".

Picture: Kham/Reuters/Picture Media



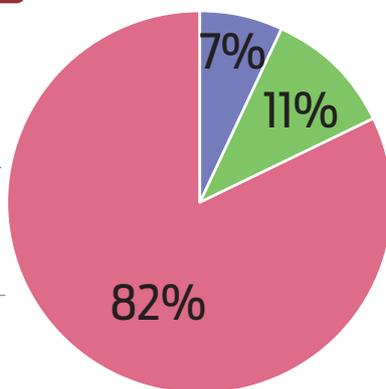
## MJA InSight Poll

Should diet supplements be more tightly regulated?

Total respondents: 214

- Yes, they are potentially harmful
- Maybe
- No, the majority are harmless

Take part in next week's poll on:  
[www.mja.com.au/insight](http://www.mja.com.au/insight)



## MJA Podcasts



Professor Margaret Hamilton, AO, is a legend of the drug and alcohol healthcare sector. She was the founding director of Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre in Victoria and has been on the Australian National Council on Drugs since its inception in 1988. She speaks about the crystal methamphetamine "epidemic" and what GPs can do to help their addicted patients.

Dr Nikhil Pooviah, Dr Raghav Murali-Ganesh and Dr Akshat Saxena are young doctors who are part of the "digital native" generation — a growing cohort using digital technology to improve outcomes for their patients. They discuss their smartphone app "CancerAid" and ways they believe hospital workflows and care can be streamlined.



Podcasts are available at [www.mja.com.au/multimedia/podcasts](http://www.mja.com.au/multimedia/podcasts) and from iTunes. Also available as videos at [www.mja.com.au/multimedia](http://www.mja.com.au/multimedia)

## Most read MJA articles online

- Editorial:** Not just loading and age: the dynamics of osteoarthritis, obesity and inflammation  
doi: 10.5694/mja15.01069
- Research:** SEPSIS KILLS: early intervention saves lives  
doi: 10.5694/mja15.00657
- Case report:** Fulminant liver failure and transplantation after use of dietary supplements  
doi: 10.5694/mja15.00816
- Short report:** How severe was the 2015 influenza season in Australia?  
doi: 10.5694/mja15.01094
- Perspective:** Developing competence in biostatistics and research methodology during medical specialty training  
doi: 10.5694/mja15.00470

## Most read MJA InSight articles

- Comment:** Dr Simon Hendel: Time for government to tackle anti-vaxxers  
<https://www.mja.com.au/insight/2016/3/time-government-tackle-anti-vaxxers>
- News:** More to osteoarthritis than overloaded joints  
<https://www.mja.com.au/insight/2016/3/more-osteoarthritis-overloaded-joints>
- News:** Diet supplements threat to liver  
<https://www.mja.com.au/insight/2016/3/diet-supplements-threat-liver>
- Comment:** Jane McCredie: Paleo diet bordering on ridiculous  
<https://www.mja.com.au/insight/2016/3/paleo-diet-bordering-ridiculous>
- Comment:** Dr Tim Lindsay: Training crisis means more bullying  
<https://www.mja.com.au/insight/2016/2/training-crisis-means-more-bullying>

## New evidence suggests Zika virus can cross placental barrier

Zika virus has been detected in the amniotic fluid of two pregnant women whose fetuses had been diagnosed with microcephaly, according to a study published in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* last month. The report suggests that Zika virus can cross the placental barrier, but does not prove that the virus causes microcephaly. “The number of reported cases of newborn babies with microcephaly in Brazil in 2015 has increased 20-fold compared with previous years. At the same time, Brazil has reported a high number of Zika virus infections, leading to speculation that the two may be linked. The two women presented with symptoms of Zika infection including fever, muscle pain and a rash during their first trimester. Ultrasounds taken at approximately 22 weeks of pregnancy confirmed the fetuses had microcephaly. Samples of amniotic fluid were taken at 28 weeks and analysed for potential infections. Both patients tested negative for dengue virus, chikungunya virus and other infections such as HIV, syphilis and herpes. Although the two women’s blood and urine samples tested negative for Zika virus, their amniotic fluid tested positive for Zika virus genome and Zika antibodies.”

## Eighth retraction for former Baker IDI researcher

Anna Ahimastos, a former heart researcher with Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute in Melbourne, has recorded her eighth retraction after faking patient records. “The [Baker IDI] investigation found fabricated patients records in some papers; in other papers, such as the newly retracted 2010 study in *Atherosclerosis*, the original data source could not be verified,” **Retraction Watch** reports. “The latest retraction — *A role for plasma transforming growth factor- $\beta$  and matrix metalloproteinases in aortic aneurysm surveillance in Marfan syndrome?* — followed up on a previous clinical trial, examining how a blood pressure drug might help patients with a life-threatening genetic disorder. That previous trial — which also included 17 patients with Marfan syndrome treated with either placebo or perindopril — has been retracted from *JAMA*; the *New England Journal of Medicine* has also retracted a related letter.” A spokesperson for Baker IDI was quoted as saying: “In total, this brings the number of retractions arising from our investigations to eight and concludes the process of correcting the public record in relation to three studies with which the researcher was associated. We are not aware of Miss Ahimastos’ current whereabouts.”

## Is dementia in decline? *NEJM* urges caution



A perspective published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (doi: 10.1056/NEJMp1514434) warns that research in the same issue showing a 20% decrease in dementia incidence each decade from 1975 to the present should cause physicians and researchers to “think carefully”. “Faced with choices between equally defensible epidemiologic projections, physicians and researchers must think carefully about what stories they emphasise to patients and policymakers. The implications, especially for investment in long-term care facilities, are enormous. Our explanations of decline are equally important, since they guide

investments in behavior change, medications, and other treatments. Optimism about dementia is more justified than ever before. Even if death and taxes remain inevitable, cancer, coronary artery disease (CAD), and dementia may not. But cautious optimism should not become complacency. If we can elucidate the changes that have contributed to these improvements, perhaps we can extend them. Today, the dramatic reductions in CAD-related mortality are under threat. The incipient improvements in dementia are presumably even more fragile. The burden of disease, ever malleable, can easily relapse.”

## WHO releases “R&D Blueprint” in search for Zika vaccine

The World Health Organization (WHO) has set in motion a “rapid R&D response” to the Zika virus outbreak in Brazil, learning from its Ebola virus experience in West Africa. Writing on **WHO’s website**, Dr Marie-Paule Kieny, Assistant Director-General,

Health Systems and Innovation, said “our relatively poor knowledge of the Zika virus presents a series of challenges for research and development”. “Numerous groups are looking at the feasibility of initiating animal or human testing, particularly for vaccines and diagnostics. For vaccines, the landscape is evolving swiftly, and numbers change daily. About 15 companies and research groups have been identified so far. Two vaccine candidates seem to be at a more advanced stage: a DNA vaccine from the US and an inactivated product from India. Although the landscape is encouraging, it will be at least 18 months before vaccines could be tested in large-scale trials. For diagnostics, 10 biotech companies have been identified so far that can provide nucleic acid or serological tests. Ebola taught the global R&D community many valuable lessons, and proved that when we work together, we can develop new medical products much faster than we thought possible. Although we know even less about Zika than we did about Ebola, we are learning more every day and are much better prepared to advance much-needed research to blunt the threat of Zika.”

## ‘Beer goggles’ a myth, says new research

Researchers from the University of Bristol in the UK have found that there is no association between the amount of alcohol consumed and perception of attractiveness, according to their study published in *Alcohol and Alcoholism*. The authors ran an “observational study conducted simultaneously across three public houses in Bristol”. “Excessive alcohol consumption is linked to unsafe sexual behaviours. This relationship may, at least in part, be mediated by increased perceived attractiveness of others after alcohol consumption, a relationship colloquially termed the ‘beer-goggles effect’,” the authors wrote. “Participants were required to rate the attractiveness of male and female face stimuli and landscape stimuli administered via an Android tablet computer application, after which their expired breath alcohol concentration was measured. Linear regression revealed no clear evidence for relationships between alcohol consumption and either overall perception of attractiveness for stimuli, for faces specifically, or for opposite-sex faces. The naturalistic research methodology was feasible, with high levels of participant engagement and enjoyment.”



Cate Swannell doi:10.5694/mja16.n0703