

Computer software gives early warning of emerging new 'legal highs'

A computer early warning system will spot new so-called 'legal highs' as they emerge across the country, according to findings presented at the Health Protection Agency's annual conference at the University of Warwick.

The Health Protection Agency's National Poisons Information Service is to fit new software to its Toxbase database to detect new compounds as they are introduced onto the UK drug scene.

Toxbase is an online information resource used by health-care professionals seeking advice on the treatment of poisoned patients. Each year it handles more than 500 000 online enquiries across the UK.

The software will automatically flag up new cases of interest within hours of patients presenting at hospital accident and emergency departments across the country. Until now, the National Poisons Information Service has had to interrogate Toxbase retrospectively to reveal new trends.

Dr Michael Eddleston, who presented on Toxbase at the conference, said: 'An email will be generated informing National Poisons Information

Service that the page of interest has been viewed within 5 minutes of it being accessed by a health-care professional. This could indicate that a newly identified recreational drug has been used.

He continued: 'The system will allow online enquiries made across different hospitals to be considered as a whole, which should allow us to pick up new incidents and trends.'

In 2009–10 the National Poisons Information Service recorded a large increase in enquiries related to the recreational drug mephedrone. There were 4500 online and 292 telephone enquiries from health-care professionals related to mephedrone in the year – up from none in 2008–9.

The software could also help highlight new drugs of misuse by providing information on

unsuccessful searches. Rapid identification of such drugs will help provide important data about symptoms and best treatment.

It will also be able to spot chemical incidents within hours of people reporting to hospital accident and emergency departments, which should help speed up the diagnosis and treatment of people suffering the effects of chemical poisonings.

Updated nutrition advice for liver patients

The British Liver Trust has released a new, updated version of its publication *Diet and Liver Disease*. The publication has been reviewed by leading dietitians, hepatologists and patients and is recognized by the British Dietetic Association.

Andrew Langford, Chief Executive of the British Liver Trust said: 'Good nutrition is essential if you have a liver condition and the British Liver

Trust has recognized that people with liver conditions struggle to gain access to professional dietary advice.'

Susie Hamlin, Liver Transplant and Hepatology Specialist Dietitian at St James's University Hospital, Leeds, added: 'This is a hugely informative and high quality publication with up-to-date information on dietary considerations for people with different types or stages of liver dis-

ease. I would recommend it for anyone involved in providing care to patients with liver disease in all settings.'

Diet and Liver Disease gives dietary advice specific for different liver conditions. It also explains the role of liver in processing nutrients, the interaction of diet in the development of liver disease, as well as the importance of good nutrition in supporting liver function when damage has occurred.

To order free copies of the publication please contact the Trust on 01425 481320 or email info@britishlivertrust.org.uk



Half a million people with diabetes in England at risk of blindness

More than half a million people with diabetes in England are at increased risk of blindness because they have not received retinal screening, an essential annual check which tests for diabetic retinopathy.

Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of blindness in the country's working-age population and Diabetes UK warns that blindness is just one complication that people with diabetes could be at risk of

because they are missing out on a wide range of health checks and specialist services.

In the National Diabetes Audit 2009–10 nearly a third (32%) of people with type 1 diabetes and one in seven (15%) with type 2 diabetes have not had a foot check.

Diabetes UK's 15 measures describe the care and management that people with diabetes should expect to receive from the NHS:

- Get your blood glucose levels measured
- Have your blood pressure measured
- Have your cholesterol measured
- Have your eyes looked at
- Have your legs and feet checked
- Have your kidney functions monitored
- Have your weight checked
- Get support if you are a smoker
- Receive care planning to meet your individual needs
- Attend an education course
- Receive paediatric care if you are a child or young person
- Receive high-quality care if admitted to hospital
- Get information and specialist care if you are planning to have a baby
- See diabetes specialist health-care professionals
- Get emotional and psychological support.