Epidemiological studies on the extent of co-trimoxazole resistance are also necessary in various urban and rural centres in South Africa and resistance levels should be monitored on a continuous basis.

Heather H Crewe-Brown
Maria P Reyneke
Manikant Khoosal
Department of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases National Health Laboratory Service and School of Pathology University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg

Piet J Becker
Medical Research Council Pretoria

Alan S Karstaedt
Department of Medicine
Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital and University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg

Unnoticed decline in the number of unnatural deaths in South Africa

To the Editor: In South Africa, deaths due to unnatural causes among adults aged 15 - 49 years underwent a major decline during the second half of the 1990s. This reduction has gone almost unnoticed. Table I shows published data from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) for the period 1993 - 1996, based on all registered deaths. As no similar figures have been published recently, these preliminary findings are supported by recent data on the extent of co-trimoxazole resistance in various urban and rural centres in South Africa and resistance levels should be monitored on a continuous basis.

Table I. Number of deaths among males and females aged 15 - 49 years for the period 1993 - 1996 (reported deaths) and the period 1997 - 2000 (estimated)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Females</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unnatural deaths</td>
<td>Natural deaths</td>
<td>Unnatural deaths</td>
<td>Natural deaths</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>24 062</td>
<td>19 558</td>
<td>5 328</td>
<td>13 759</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>25 852</td>
<td>21 208</td>
<td>5 841</td>
<td>15 937</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>33 706</td>
<td>29 158</td>
<td>7 512</td>
<td>22 366</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>36 478</td>
<td>38 565</td>
<td>8 627</td>
<td>30 394</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>36 867</td>
<td>45 364</td>
<td>8 826</td>
<td>37 996</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>34 900</td>
<td>58 220</td>
<td>8 427</td>
<td>50 357</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>31 999</td>
<td>70 504</td>
<td>7 879</td>
<td>65 394</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>29 560</td>
<td>80 989</td>
<td>6 843</td>
<td>82 343</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Stats SA (various years)\(^{(1)}\) (for data from 1993 to 1996, and Stats SA (2001)\(^{(2)}\) for the unadjusted data from 1997 to 2000).

Deaths have been on the decline for both males and females. These preliminary findings are supported by recent data released by Stats SA (2002)\(^{(2)}\) based on a 15.0% sample of all registered deaths from 1997 to 2001. These data show that as a percentage of all male deaths in the sample (N = 150 969),

deaths due to unnatural causes declined from 23.0% in 1997 to 19.9% in 1999, and to 15.9% in 2001. Similarly, for females, out of a total of 128 618 deaths in the sample, the percentage of deaths due to these causes declined from 9.9% in 1997 to 8.1% in 1999, and to 5.5% in 2001.

Ordinarily this would have been cause for celebration, with the various role players identified and given due merit. Unfortunately these gains have been eroded by the rapid rise in natural deaths, with infectious and parasitic diseases accounting for 20.5% of all male deaths in the sample and 21.5% of all female deaths in the sample. In this case the decrease in unnatural deaths pales alongside the increase in natural deaths. This possibly explains the reason for the missed opportunity to celebrate.

Sulaiman Bah
National School of Public Health
Medical University of Southern Africa
PO Medunsa
0204

Treatment of uncomplicated falciparum malaria in non-immune and semi-immune individuals exceeding 65 kg body weight

To the Editor: We report on our experience using co-artemether for the treatment of uncomplicated falciparum malaria in subjects exceeding 65 kg body weight.

Co-artemether (Coartem, Novartis), a fixed combination of 20 mg of artemether and 120 mg of lumefantrine, was registered in South Africa on 13 April 2000. The package insert lists as indication the treatment of uncomplicated falciparum malaria in patients up to 65 kg body weight, living in malaria-endemic areas. The insert further states, ‘There is no adequate experience in patients weighing over 65 kg’.1

Materials and methods
Expatriate workers were classified as non-immune, while Mozambican workers were classified as semi-immune.

The case definition adopted for semi-immune subjects was the presence of a febrile illness together with either a positive rapid antigen test or positive Giemsa-stained peripheral blood smear, where no other obvious cause of illness was apparent. For non-immune subjects the case definition was the presence of either a positive smear or rapid histidine-rich protein II (HRP-II) antigen test for Plasmodium falciparum, with no history

Fig. 1. Trend in natural and unnatural deaths among males aged 15 - 49 years, 1993 - 2000.

Fig. 2. Trend in natural and unnatural deaths among females aged 15 - 49 years, 1993 - 2000.