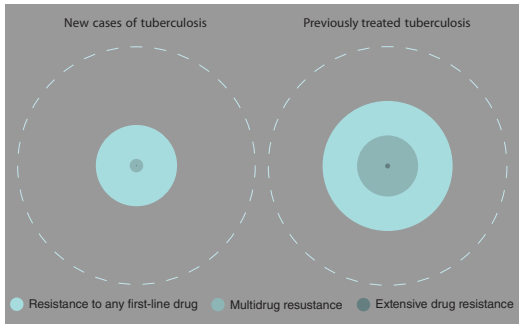
Drug-resistant tuberculosis takes hold in China



China faces a still-spreading epidemic of drug-resistant tuberculosis, according to the first nationwide study of the disease. The survey, reported last month in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (**366**, 2161–2170, 2012), found that one in ten people treated for tuberculosis in 2007 had a form of the disease that didn't respond to multiple medicines. Worryingly, most of the estimated 110,000 drug-resistant cases in China occurred in people newly diagnosed with tuberculosis, suggesting that drug-resistant bacteria are spreading from person to person rather than just evolving in people who don't respond to first-line treatments. "We need to be looking at everybody, because if you restrict yourself to the so-called 'high risk patients' you're going to miss most of the cases," says Richard Chaisson, director of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Tuberculosis Research in Baltimore who wrote an accompany commentary (*N. Engl. J. Med.* **366**, 2223–2224, 2012).

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in Miami last month with mail fraud over the sale of potentially fake and otherwise misbranded drugs to American customers. The allegations follow the discovery in August 2006 of fake versions of Lipitor (atorvastatin) and Celebrex (celecoxib), two widely prescribed drugs from New York–based Pfizer. "We will aggressively pursue those who engage in such illicit activity as counterfeit medicines," says the company's chief security officer John Clark. According to a grand jury indictment, Strempler (pictured), the former head of RxNorth.com, sold drugs that he claimed had been packaged in Canada but allegedly originated from the Bahamas.


Associated Press

BUSINESS

Let HER2 rip

Roche's cancer drug franchise has added another weapon in the fight against advanced breast cancer. On 8 June, the Swiss company's South San Francisco–based subsidiary, Genentech, won approval for Perjeta (pertuzumab) for the treatment of metastatic breast tumors in people with high levels of a protein called human epidermal growth factor receptor 2 (HER2), which is elevated in around 20% of all breast cancer cases. Perjeta is designed to be used with Genentech's existing antibody drug Herceptin (trastuzumab), which, like Perjeta, binds HER2, but at a different region of the protein. A combination of the two drugs, together with chemotherapy, boosted progression-free survival by six months compared to Herceptin and chemotherapy alone (*N. Engl. J. Med.* **366**, 109–119, 2012). That added benefit comes at considerable extra cost: Perjeta is priced at close to $6,000 a month, on top of the $4,500 a month cost for Herceptin.

Rare blow

Pfizer's foray into rare diseases suffered a setback last month after the US Food and Drug Administration declined to approve its drug for the treatment of a rare and fatal neurodegenerative disease known as transthyretin familial amyloid polyneuropathy, which affects an estimated 8,000 people worldwide. In a 128-person pivotal trial, participants who took the drug—tafamidis, which helps stabilize the defective transthyretin protein that is associated with the disease—outperformed those receiving placebo on a scale of neurological function, but only when study subjects who dropped out of the study for liver transplants were excluded from the analysis. Agency staffers asked New York–based Pfizer for another efficacy study with a revised endpoint that takes into consideration the high rate of attrition due to organ transplants. European regulators approved the drug, marketed as Vyndaqel, in November 2011.

Corrections

In the June 2012 issue, the article entitled "The vetting process" (*Nat. Med.* **18**, 847–849, 2012) stated that capture myopathy kills up to half of all wildlife brought into captivity. The correct proportion is up to one in ten. The error has been corrected in the PDF and HTML versions of this article.

In the June 2012 issue, the article entitled "The vetting process" (*Nat. Med.* **18**, 847–849, 2012) incorrectly stated that the research techniques designed for freezing, thawing and grafting ovarian tissue for wildlife conservation had helped women give birth to healthy babies after fertility-compromising cancer treatments. These techniques are helping fertility preservation methods but have not been directly applied in human treatments. The error has been corrected in the HTML and PDF versions of the article.

In the March 2012 issue, the article entitled "Korea okays stem cell therapies despite limited peer-review data" (*Nat. Med.* **18**, 329, 2012) incorrectly stated that the Hearticellgram-AMI therapy results related to 80 individuals. In fact, the number is 59, and the difference in left ventricular ejection fraction changes between the treatment and control group was statistically significant. Additionally, the information about this therapy was available through poster presentations, not exclusively through press releases by the Korea Food and Drug Administration, as originally stated. The errors have been corrected in the HTML and PDF versions of the article.