

MEDPULSE

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CRISPR Allows for Gene-Edited Food Products (January 2020, Canada)

The last major advance in genetically engineered food products occurred with the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMO). Despite the World Health Organization declaring GMO foods to be safe for consumption, only 37% of Canadians believe that GMOs were safe to consume. Scientists are looking to introduce genetically edited products into the Canadian food system using CRISPR gene-editing technology. Unlike GMOs, however, gene-editing tools will disable genes rather than adding foreign genes to an existing genome. Although gene-edited foods face fewer regulatory hurdles from Health Canada and might alleviate public concern, critics argue that there should be close monitoring for health complications resulting from the consumption of these products. It will be interesting to see how Canadian regulatory organizations will manage the introduction of these products.

Microsoft launches AI for Health Initiative (January 2020, USA)

In January, Microsoft unveiled the AI for Health program, a five-year project to help healthcare organizations improve global health through leveraging the potential of artificial intelligence and machine learning. The \$40 million program is an initiative that aims to support the efforts of select non-profits and healthcare innovators by providing them with AI tools and help from Microsoft's leading data scientists to integrate these technologies into their work. Some of the initiative's goals include working with organizations to improve the diagnosis of sudden infant death syndrome, tackling leprosy, increasing the usage of AI in diabetic retinopathy diagnostics, and improving cross-organizational data access.

South Africa Stops Low-Cost Benefit Options for Healthcare (December 2019, South Africa)

The South African Council for Medical Schemes (CMS) plans to prohibit low-cost benefit options for healthcare, with the hope to ensure universal access to healthcare. The "low-cost benefit option" (LCBO) was initially created to provide healthcare options to the financially disadvantaged. However, the recent economic downturn in South Africa has made the LCBO seem unsustainable. Since then, the CMS has been working to create a new minimum benefits package as an alternative to the LCBO. No further details have been outlined about this new plan.

References can be found at www.meducator.org

Concerns Over The Effects of Brexit on Healthcare

(January 2020, United Kingdom)

With the United Kingdom (UK) formally leaving the European Union (EU) in 2020, there have been concerns about the emigration of foreign-born UK medical professionals and potential shortages in medical supplies. Tackling global outbreaks could also become harder if the UK loses access the EU's early warning systems. As these outbreaks pose cross-border health threats, exiting the EU could affect global health.

Coronavirus Outbreak in China Surges Past 80,000 Cases Worldwide (February 2020, China)

The 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19) has now reached over 80,000 cases worldwide, with Chinese health authorities having reported over 70,000 individuals in China alone. Multiple countries have suspended international transportation to heavily infected countries. The novel coronavirus shares 79.5% similarity to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARS-CoV) and enters through the same entry receptor: the ACE2 receptor. The National Institute of Health has begun to test an antiviral drug, remdesvir, as a possible treatment for COVID-19.

Surge in PTSD and Depression Symptoms Following Social Unrest in Hong Kong (February 2020, Hong Kong)

Studies have reported that almost one in three adults in Hong Kong (HK) have reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and one in ten experienced symptoms of depression. For many residents in HK, it is seen as shameful to have a mental illness. Costs of therapy in HK frequently exceed \$300 USD per session. Therapy is often inaccessible even for those who actively seek it.

Arab Health 2020 Conference Promotes International Collaboration

(January 2020, UAE)

Several Irish healthcare companies are preparing to showcase their world-class healthcare expertise and cutting edge solutions at Arab Health 2020, the largest healthcare exhibition and conference in the Middle East. The conference has also led to successful international commercial partnerships. The Irish digital health company, myPatientSpace, has partnered with the Neuro Spinal Hospital in Dubai to offer personalized digital health companions to patients. Integration of mobile applications into hospital care will reduce wait times and simplify appointment cancellations.

Researchers Predict Global Spread of Dengue (December 2019, Australia)

Researchers have created a network model that predicts the monthly number of dengue-infected passengers at airports across the world. After tracking international air travel, the research team was able to calculate both the probability of passengers on any flight being infected with dengue and the probability of being infected with dengue at any travel destination. It is estimated that dengue causes around 50 to 100 million symptomatic infections per year, driven mostly by international air travel. However, under-reporting has led to a lack of awareness and diagnosis, making dengue an even more pressing issue to non-endemic countries.

