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CAMBRIDGE SOCIETY FOR THE APPLICATION OF
RESEARCH

'Darling, there is something I have to tell you.....'

Development of new diagnostics for sexually-transmitted diseases

Dr Helen Lee

Reader in Medical Biotechnology, Department of Haematology, University of Cambridge

Monday, 3rd November, 2003: **7.30 p.m. - 9.00 p.m.**
The Wolfson Lecture Theatre, Churchill College, Cambridge

Chair: Dr Ted Bianco PhD FIBiol, Director of Technology Transfer,
The Wellcome Trust

Vote of Thanks: Professor Laurie Hall FRS (Can), FRSC, The Herchel Smith
Laboratory for Medicinal Chemistry, University of Cambridge

Dr Helen Lee writes.....

Chlamydia trachomatis is the most common bacterial sexually transmitted pathogen in western countries, with rates of Chlamydia infection in the UK having doubled in 5 years. A recent enquiry by the Commons Health Select Committee concluded that the NHS sexual health services are in crisis.

Early detection and treatment of Chlamydia infection is necessary to prevent serious complications such as pelvic inflammatory infection, ectopic pregnancy and infertility. However, diagnosis of this infection is complicated by the fact that up to 70 % of the women and up to 50% of the men are asymptomatic. This talk will review the current testing technologies, the cost effectiveness of the various approaches and the impact of simple and inexpensive point-of-care rapid tests as a screening tool.

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About the speaker:

Dr Lee received her Master's degree from University of Oxford and PhD from Cornell University. She is currently Reader in Medical Biotechnology at the Department of Haematology, University of Cambridge. With support from WHO, NIH and the Wellcome Trust, she created the Rapid Diagnostic Development Unit with the goal to develop innovative, simple and inexpensive rapid tests for the detection of infectious agents in resource-limited settings.

Prior to Cambridge University, she held the position of General Manager, Probe Diagnostics Business Unit at Abbott Laboratories in Chicago and was responsible for marketing, regulatory affairs and R&D of both instruments and chemistry development of the DNA amplification technology. She holds a number of patents, is the author of over 130 publications and editor of a book on nucleic acid amplification technologies.

Organising Secretary's Notes:

Sexually transmitted diseases are as ubiquitous as the common cold, amongst those who go in for the related activities! A point which has not gone unnoticed by the Blair administration, which purports to encourage sexual health amongst its youngsters.

Unfortunately, the reality often falls short of the ideal at the Primary Care Trust level. So whereas in a rural area of Kent a woman (or a man) can have a diagnosis for Chlamydia simply by taking a sample of first-flow urine to her doctors, such a luxury is simply unavailable here in Cambridge.

Based on polymerase chain reaction technology, our local PCT has thus far chosen not to invest sufficiently in the necessary hardware to enable first-flow urine analyses for Chlamydia and other micro-organisms to be readily available across the region.

Seemingly, the government is capable of talking the talk, but not so good at walking the walk!

(I couldn't resist the title, sorry!)

Richard Freeman

CSAR Organising Secretary