

# Free care to non-Hep C Anti-D women denied

**PAUL CULLEN**  
Health Correspondent

THE MINISTER for Health has rejected a request to extend entitlement to special medical services to women who received contaminated blood but have tested negative for Hepatitis C.

Dr James Reilly said extending eligibility for services to those who tested negative for Hepatitis C would have significant cost implications.

He was responding to a request from Sinn Féin health spokesman Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin to use his powers under the Hepatitis C Compensation Tribunal Act to broaden eligibility.

Mr Ó Caoláin said many women who got blood products from contaminated batches of Anti-D in 1977-79 and 1991-94 had severe health problems consistent with testing positive.

Anti-D immunoglobulin is a life-saving blood product that prevents the

build-up of harmful antibodies in a mother's blood. However, some of the batches manufactured by the Blood Transfusion Service Board became infected during these two time periods.

Dr Reilly said the Health Amendment Act card was given to people who contracted Hepatitis C from the administration, within the State, of blood or blood products. Entitlement to a card was decided by the HSE and was determined by a diagnostic test. It entitles

the holder to a range of services including GP visits, prescribed drugs, home help, dental and optical appliances, and physiotherapy.

A great deal of consideration had been given to the issue of people who got Anti-D but neither tested positive for Hepatitis C nor had a decision of the tribunal in their favour, the Minister told Mr Ó Caoláin.

A number of women who had tested negative for Hepatitis C had experi-

enced a variety of symptoms, he said. "However, there is no scientific proof that the symptoms are specific evidence of Hepatitis C infection. Indeed some symptoms of Hepatitis C, such as fatigue, fibromyalgia and depression, are common conditions that occur in the general population."

An estimated 16,000 Irish women were exposed to potentially infectious batches of Anti-D. About 1,000 of them became infected with Hepatitis C.

## Unsettling news about soothers

Pacifier use can curb development in boys by stopping the mirroring of facial expressions

**ANTHONY KING**

SOOTHERS MAY calm tantrums in a moment, but excessive use could cause lasting harm.

Studies of US and French children have found that soothers may curb emotional development in boys. Research on children and adults also found that a poor score card in emotional maturity in adults could be linked to heavy soother use as a young child.

"We can talk to infants, but at least initially they aren't going to understand what the words mean," said Dr Paula Niedenthal, a psychologist at the University of Wisconsin who led the study.

"So the way we communicate with infants at first is by using the tone of our voice and our facial expressions," she said.

Infants rely on reading facial expressions for learning and part of this learning is copying those facial expressions. With a pacifier in their mouth, a baby is less able to mirror those expressions and the emotions they represent.

By making the same face as their parent, an infant can learn about their feelings. In fact, nerves from the brain cause facial expressions but nerves from the face also go back to the brain.

"Boys that use a pacifier for a longer period of time showed less facial mimicry," said Dr Niedenthal.

"And the longer boys reported having used a pacifier, the lower their score of empathy."

However, the problem is only linked to soother use during daytime, not during sleep. This is the first such study to link soother sucking with psychological consequences.

"Parents should consider why they are introducing the [soother] and when they are using it and whether it is for the child or for themselves," added Dr Niedenthal.

People of all ages often mimic the expressions and body language of those around them. When we mimic somebody else, we have a greater appreciation for how they are feeling.

Soothers occupy muscles around the mouth and disrupt a child's facial mimicry. It also blocks adults from seeing how a child is reacting and prevents them mirroring these reactions.

The effect was seen only in boys, not girls. The researchers speculate that parents could be compensating with daughters by assisting them more in expression and emotional learning or girls themselves may be using soothers less at certain times.

"Or the girls are just developing fast enough that, by the time they start to use [soothers], certain kinds of behaviour are already in play. Mimicry and eye contact, for example, occur early in girls," said Dr Niedenthal.

The use of soothers is already controversial. The World Health Organisation recommends limiting their use, partly to promote successful breastfeeding and partly because of a link between soother use and middle ear infections and dental abnormalities.

However, some medical groups recommend their use during sleep in the first year of life as a preventive measure against sudden infant death syndrome.

The study was reported in the current issue of the journal *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*.



Pianist Orla O'Sullivan from Cork, with her son John Amadeus. She won the workplace award. Photograph: Cyril Byrne

## Hidden Hearing Heroes awarded for selfless contribution to society

**DICK AHLSTROM**

THE SELFLESS contribution made to society by Ireland's deaf and hard of hearing community was celebrated yesterday at the Hidden Hearing Heroes Awards.

The awards celebrate those people who support their community, workplace, family or sport in an exceptional way.

The awards programme is run by Hidden Hearing with the support of the Irish Deaf Society.

RTE television personality Brenda

Donohue presented the awards yesterday in Dublin.

Members of the public are invited to nominate a hero who they feel deserves recognition for their contribution.

The winners this year came from Dublin, Offaly, Cork, Wexford and Roscommon.

The 2012 award winners are:

- Orla O'Sullivan (Cork), workplace award
- Dominic McGreal (Dublin), social contribution award

- John Cradden (Celbridge), media award
- Marcus Conroy (Roscommon), youth award
- Gene Barry (Birr), grandparent award
- Eoin Nolan (Wexford), sportsperson award
- Killian McDonnell (Dublin), student award
- Irish Deaf Woman's Group, organisation award for its 20 years in supporting deaf women
- Des O'Callaghan (Dublin), lifetime achievement award

## Unhealthy ageing a cause for concern

**GENEVIEVE CARBERY**

THE NUMBER of "healthy life years" a person had was becoming a major issue of concern to policymakers as people lived longer, a professor of geriatric medicine has said.

In Ireland a woman aged 65 would live on average for 20 more years but 10 of these would be "healthy lives" without cognitive or physical disability and disease, Prof Rose Anne Kenny, principal investigator of the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (Tilda), said.

Prof Kenny was speaking at a public meeting on reversing ageing organised by the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland last week. She also spoke of a major lack of awareness of high blood pressure found by the study of people over 50 years old. Tilda researchers found that 57 per cent of men and 49 per cent of women with hypertension were unaware of the problem, she said.

She also identified a lack of awareness among older people of irregular heart fibrillation, something that could be treated.

Three-quarters of older people who were not aware that they had irregular heart fibrillation were at risk of stroke, she said.

Addressing the meeting on living longer and healthier was *New York Times* best-selling author Chris Crowley. Mr Crowley said 70 per cent of ageing was voluntary and heavily in people's control.

Half of serious illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's and cancer could be avoided with behavioural changes, said Mr Crowley

who co-authored the *Younger Next Year* series. If there was a "silver bullet" it would be serious aerobic exercise four days a week, which makes a "huge difference to quality of life", he said.

Aerobic exercise changes blood, impacts on mood and "makes you smarter", he said. He also spoke of the impact on ageing that strength training can have. As people got older, accidents become a major feature of health, so being able to stop yourself falling was important, he said.

Serious strength training was "almost the only way to overcome osteoporosis", he said.

Nutrition also makes an enormous difference as there is a tendency towards eating "dead food" with no nutrients that had a "huge impact on making the body work right", he said.

He also spoke of the tendency for some older people to get isolated and the negative impact this can have on ageing. "It makes a world of sense to make a conscious effort in life after you retire," he said.