

## Award-winning medics warn of future threats

Five doctors from the USA and UK – set to receive Prince Mahidol Awards this month – are worried about public health burdens that will accompany economic development and changing lifestyles in coming years: high blood pressure, obesity, cancer and diarrhoea.

They are also seriously concerned about the possibility of infectious disease pandemics in coming years. Widespread use of antibiotics on patients in developing countries is likely to cause increasing drug resistance and put millions at risk.

The five physicians voiced their fears at a press conference at Siriraj Hospital organised by the Prince Mahidol Award Foundation under Royal Patronage.

The 2010 Prince Mahidol Laureates in the field of medicine are Professor Nicholas J White of Mahidol and Oxford Universities and Professor Kevin Marsh of Oxford University.

In the field of public health, awards will be presented to Professor Ananda S Prasad of Wyne State University School of Medicine, Professor Kenneth H Brown of the University of California at Davis and Professor Robert E Black, of the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University.

Professor Black, whose work on the importance of childhood nutrition significantly contributed to wider use of zinc supplements, said high blood pressure, obesity and cancer had to be brought under control. If these problems, caused mostly by changing lifestyles and economic development, could not be reduced, the



**FIVE FOREIGN** doctors, set to receive Prince Mahidol Awards, yesterday visit an exhibition room at Siriraj Hospital, after they signed get-well messages for His Majesty the King, who is under treatment there.

world would face an onerous burden in the near future.

Professor Black's research in Bangladesh and India demonstrated that daily zinc supplements could significantly cut the severity of episodes of diarrhoea. Similar effects were observed with pneumonia.

Prof Black has also described the diarrhoea-nutrition cycle, in which episodes of diarrhoea lead to malnutrition and deficiency of trace elements, which in turn increase the incidence and severity of diarrhoea.

Meanwhile, Prof White, a world leader in treating malaria, especially using artemisinin-based combination therapies, said the re-emergence of antibiotic resistance was now his greatest concern due to the overuse of antibiotic drugs.

"Although this problem has still not occurred in Thailand, it is a worldwide problem, particularly in developing countries where antibiotic drugs have been used a lot to treat infectious disease," he said.

Prof White advocates a com-

bination of artemisinin with other drugs in order to increase their effectiveness and avoid further drug resistance.

Meanwhile, Prof Prasad used his speech to slam a number of United Nations organisations for failing to address the global problem of zinc deficiency.

The WHO, Unesco, Unicef and FAO had ignored findings indicating that more than 2 billion people in developing countries were facing zinc deficiency, he said. "No program has been instituted to correct this problem," he said.

Prof Brown has encouraged health-related agencies around the world to introduce zinc supplements to reduce the incidence and severity of diarrhoea and pneumonia, especially in children living in developing countries.

Their Majesties the King and Queen of Thailand will preside over the presentation ceremony for the awards at the Chakri Maha Prasat Throne Hall at the end of this month.

**PONGPHON SARNSAMAK**  
THE NATION