Patients with sickle cell disease were successfully treated with hydroxyurea, incrementally increased doses of intravenous erythropoietin, and oral iron supplements.

After alternating doses of hydroxyurea on 4 consecutive days with erythropoietin on 3 consecutive days, researchers recorded a 28% increase in the number of reticulocytes containing fetal hemoglobin; a 48% increase was noted in the percentage of fetal hemoglobin. These increases were compared with results from hydroxyurea treatment alone.

Despite these positive results, the researchers caution that further studies need to be conducted with larger patient populations. Only four patients were enrolled in the current study, the results of which appear in the January 14 issue of *The New England Journal of Medicine*.

The federal government is considering a plan under which all childhood vaccinations would be paid for by the state and federal governments. The vaccines would be distributed free of charge to clinics and private physicians throughout the United States. Under the plan, drug manufacturers would earn a small agreed-on profit.

Despite this provision, the drug industry opposes this plan. "Universal purchase would just kill innovation because the government would control the market," comments Thomas L. Copmann, assistant vice-president of the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association.

According to government figures, only 40% to 60% of preschool children are immunized against childhood diseases; inner-city preschoolers fare even worse: 10% are immunized.

"Under our current system, with limited access to vaccine, immunization has become a privilege, says Kenneth J. Bart, MD,director of the National Vaccine Program Office in the Department of Health and Human Services. "We believe that every child has a right to be vaccinated, just as everybody has a right to clean water."

The plan is projected to cost $300 million to $500 million annually, reports the February 1 issue of the *Chicago Tribune*. However, no means of funding had been established at presstime.

Adolescents are more likely than younger children to feel "down," according to researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Human Development Center in Duluth, Minn.

Researchers Reed Larson and Mark Ham surveyed 483 students from two Chicago-area suburbs. The children, all of whom were white, were in the 5th through 9th grades. The students wore beepers throughout the study. They were beeped at random throughout the day and asked to record their emotions at that time. Participants could choose from a range of feelings: from happy to unhappy; friendly to angry; and cheerful to irritable. The children's overall negative moods were compared with the number of negative life events that each participant reported having during the previous 6 months.

Among the adolescents, 35% experienced 7 or more negative life events, compared with 24% of the younger children. Correspondingly, the former group also reported feeling down more often than the younger group: 23% versus 13%.

Adolescents tend to worry about the past and future—things beyond their immediate environment—whereas younger children live in the here and now, according to researcher Larson.

Complete study results are published in the January issue of the *Journal of Developmental Psychology*.

Eating a low-fat dinner could prevent a heart attack hours later, according to the latest research presented at the annual American Heart Association's Science Writers Conference.

George J. Miller, MD, of the Medical Research Council in London, England, studied 170 men, aged 40 years to 59 years. He found that the men with the highest fat intake had a 12% higher factor VII level than men who ate a low-fat meal.

"The higher the level of factor VII, the shorter the fuse, and the larger the explosion of clotting fac-

tors," said Dr Miller.

In a separate study, researchers at the University of Chicago found an 11% decline in factor VII levels among women who switched from a high-fat diet to a low-fat diet.

Because most heart attacks occur in the early morning hours, consuming a low-fat meal at night reduces the amount of factor VII levels, and hence, the risk of early-morning heart attack.

The fear of being sued for malpractice may play a role in the increasing number of cesarean sections being performed.

In a retrospective survey of 31 New York State hospitals in which 60,490 deliveries were performed, researchers found a positive association between malpractice claims being made against a physician and the likelihood that this physician would perform cesarean sections on patients. Furthermore, the number of cesareans performed was linked with physicians' insurance premiums: high premiums yielded greater numbers of cesarean sections while low premiums were associated with fewer cesarean deliveries.

The researchers make no claim to a cause-and-effect relationship. However, the associations uncovered cannot be overlooked.

"Our study might provide some evidence to support what the medical community is saying—that typically an obstetrician will, in a close case, decide to do a cesarean out of fear of not doing one," comments A. Russell Localio, JD, MPH, researcher and biostatistician at the Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine.

Complete results are published in the January 20 issue of *JAMA*.

Vascular—not Alzheimer's—disease accounts for most types of dementia, according to a large-scale study conducted in Gothenburg, Sweden.

Investigators examined the potential causes of dementia in a population of 494 elderly persons, aged 85 years. Participants underwent a psychiatric interview, neuropsychologic and physical examination, laboratory tests, electrocardiography, chest radiography, computed tomography of the head, and cerebrospinal fluid analysis.

Dementia was diagnosed in 147 persons, 46.9% of whom had vascular dementia and 43.5%, Alzheimer's disease. Unlike the latter disease, vascular dementia can be treated and prevented; therefore, the outlook for these patients is good, conclude the researchers.

The January 21 issue of *The New England Journal of Medicine* features this study.

As a potential anticancer agent, raspberries may be the "pick of the crop."

Raspberries, particularly their leaves, contain more ellagic acid than other common foods. It's the ellagic acid, actually, that has been shown to prevent some cancers in laboratory rats. Because of this link, the Washington Red Raspberry Commission is looking for ways to fund research that could be conducted on humans, says Commission Marketing Director Dan Petek. Specifically, researchers would need to determine if the ellagic acid does enter the human blood stream, and if so, if it prevents cancer.

The goal is to develop a "nutraceutical," or food with medicinal value, according to Petek.

"You're not pumping them with vitamins or anything else, but you may be helping them prevent cancer."