

Trauma experts criticize BBC's Holby City for 'peddling dangerous drugs'

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According to Dr Ian Roberts, Head of the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre on Injury Control at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, the recent episode ("Big Lies, Small Lies") seriously misrepresents the scientific evidence.

"In clinical trials, Factor VIIa (the drug presented in the programme) was shown to substantially increase the risk of serious side effects from unwanted clotting but it has never been shown to save lives. In fact, the most recent trial showed a trend towards more deaths with Factor VIIa" says Roberts.

In the soap's episode a woman soldier character who had been shot in combat had been treated with a drug to control bleeding, Factor VIIa. She was seen in hospital having developed a serious thrombosis. As she recovered the character explained that she would not take legal action for being given the drug because although the side effects were bad, the drug had saved her life, so implying a trade-off between a reduced risk of death and serious side effects.

Dr Roberts continues, "The storyline in Holby City was nothing more than drug company propaganda. The manufacturer of Factor VIIa has spent a lot of money peddling this dangerous myth and it is a shame that the BBC is now helping for free."

Research has shown that the only drug which has been proven to save lives in bleeding trauma patients is called tranexamic acid (TXA),

following a large international clinical trial called CRASH-2 funded by the UK government. TXA is a cheap generic drug, and therefore does not benefit from the promotion of large pharmaceutical companies. Figures from the CRASH-2 study show that if tranexamic acid was routinely given to bleeding trauma patients in the NHS it could save up to about 400 lives per year in the UK alone.

Roberts has written to Mark Thompson, Director-General of the BBC asking that screenwriters take more care and responsibility, when handling important health issues like this. "Telling the truth would make just as interesting television and might also save lives" concludes Roberts.

Provided by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

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