



An abnormal chest radiograph

Try the picture quiz in
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Breathlessness on exertion is common in older people. It is also common in the young. A questionnaire on exercise induced dyspnoea was sent to all adolescents born in 1997 and 1998 in Uppsala, Sweden (n=3838). A random subsample of 146 adolescents underwent standardised treadmill exercise tests for exercise induced bronchoconstriction and laryngeal obstruction. The resulting estimated prevalence of these two conditions in the total population was 19.2% and 5.7%, respectively. Adolescents with these conditions were no more likely to have asthma than others (*Thorax* 2014, doi:10.1136/thoraxjnl-2014-205738).

If you are obese and non-diabetic and lucky enough to get bariatric surgery in the UK, your risk of getting diabetes in the next two to three years is 80% less than for matched controls (*Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology* 2014;2:963-8, doi:10.1016/S2213-8587(14)70214-1). Half of the 2167 patient cohort had laparoscopic banding and most of the others had gastric bypass surgery. The reduced incidence of diabetes continued until the maximum seven years of follow-up.

But the association between body mass index (BMI) and mortality in established type 2 diabetes favours the plump. A prospective cohort study of 19 478 African-American and 15 354 white patients with type 2 diabetes in Louisiana shows that for African-Americans, the BMI “sweet spot” for lowest mortality lies around 33-37, and for white people at around 33-40 (*Circulation* 2014, doi:10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.114.009098). The U shaped mortality curve starts sky high at BMI 18, dips steeply to its lowest in the mid 30s, and then climbs again slowly beyond 40, although never to the starting height. These curves should be on the Diabetes UK website and in every dietitian and practice nurse’s office.

Publication of individual mortality figures for surgeons may be only a first step in interrogating their performance. Next might come analysis of their outcomes using PROMs (patient reported outcome measures). No surgeons are three standard deviations “worse than expected” for death, but 1-2% may be so using PROMs, according to a study of hip and knee replacements in English NHS hospitals in 2009-12 (*BMJ Quality and Safety* 2014, doi:10.1136/



A 65 year old Indian man presented with throat pain, dysphagia, constipation, and weight loss (<2 kg) over 1.5 months. On examination, he had pallor, urticarial rash, and epigastric tenderness. Investigations showed haemoglobin 103 g/L (reference range 130-170) and a hypochromic microcytic peripheral blood smear. Because of his dysphagia and anaemia, we performed upper gastrointestinal endoscopy, which incidentally showed multiple *Ascaris lumbricoides* (A) and *Ancylostoma duodenale* (B) in the upper duodenum. The anti-peristaltic migration of these parasitic helminths had resulted in dysphagia. His symptoms resolved after treatment with albendazole.

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Patient consent obtained.

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[bmjqs-2014-003551](#)). “Improvements will be achieved by shifting the distribution of consultants rather than by reducing variation between them,” suggest the authors. Moving bad apples into fresh barrels?

β adrenoceptor agonist inhalers worsen bronchoconstriction in many people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). An American survey of nearly 10 000 patients with COPD who had their lung function measured before and after inhaled salbutamol provides an overall figure of 5% (*Lancet Respiratory Medicine* 2014;2:911-8; doi:10.1016/S2213-2600(14)70185-7). This proportion was similar in smokers without COPD, and the phenomenon was twice as common in African-American as in white participants. Because about 10 million adults in the UK smoke, at least half a million Britons are at risk of being made more breathless if they are given a β agonist.

“Patients’ preferences for various outcomes of anticoagulant therapy vary and depend on their previous experiences with myocardial infarction or stroke” concludes a “discrete thought experiment” reported in *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes* (2014, doi:10.1161/CIRCOUTCOMES.114.001013). Given a choice between warfarin and the novel oral anticoagulants, 341 participants with a history of cardiovascular disease showed a preference for the new drugs independently of information about relative risks of bleeding and thrombotic events. Preference weighting varied widely, illustrating the importance of involving patients in all decisions about long term treatment.

The modern American diet is founded on grilled red meat grasped in a soft bread bun and washed down with beer or cola, so you might expect to see a rise in bowel cancer in the US. But the opposite is true—the overall age adjusted incidence rate of colorectal cancer decreased by 0.92% (95% CI –1.14 to –0.70) between 1975 and 2010 (*JAMA Surgery* 2014, doi:10.1001/jamasurg.2014.1756). But onset is getting younger, and the trend is towards an increase in those aged below 40.

Aldosterone, a hormone whose rapid action helps wounded young animals maintain a circulation in the face of blood loss, can play a deadlier role in older humans. US investigators measured plasma aldosterone in a random sample of 1674 people aged ≥ 45 years and found that aldosterone, even within the normal range, may be a biomarker of cardiorenal and metabolic disease (*Hypertension* 2014, doi:10.1161/HYPERTENSIONAHA.114.03936). The strongest association, as expected, was with high blood pressure.

Germany, along with the Netherlands, Scotland, England, and France, played a distinguished role in the rise of scientific medicine in the 18th and 19th centuries. But Minerva is concerned that some pockets have been left behind in the progress of evidence based medicine. A survey (*Family Practice* 2014, doi:10.1093/fampra/cmu071) of 935 German doctors found that 23% of family physicians, 6% of internists, and 31% of orthopaedists used at least four complementary and alternative therapies more than once a week.

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