

Between 1988 and 1990 reports of rubella in the United States increased fourfold, and the total for 1990 was 1093 cases (*Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 1991;40:93-9). There were 10 reports of congenital rubella. These figures are the worst since 1982; investigations have pointed to failure to vaccinate as the cause rather than a failure of the vaccine to protect.

Meanwhile in England and Wales, with a population of one quarter that of the United States, there were 24 000 cases of rubella and 26 000 of measles in 1989. The "OPCS Monitor" (1991 MB2 91/1) says the measles total is the lowest since figures were first published in 1940. Should the new general practitioner contract be credited with the recent substantial improvements in immunisation in childhood that underlie these figures?

A prospective, randomised controlled trial of treatments for diarrhoea in infants has shown that electrolyte solutions based on rice were more effective than those based on glucose (*New England Journal of Medicine* 1991;324:517-21). Glucose solutions are potentially life saving, but they have little or no obvious effect on the diarrhoea, whereas rice solutions quickly reduce the volume of the stools—and this may make it more acceptable to mothers in Third World countries.

Few women in the United States use either of the two intrauterine contraceptive devices still on the market there; four other devices have been withdrawn because of fears by their manufacturers of litigation. Yet according to a paper in the "Journal of Clinical Epidemiology" (1991;44:109-22) the leading study linking intrauterine devices with pelvic inflammatory disease was flawed and reanalysis of the data showed no increase in risk. Is this another example of a mistaken guilty verdict—in line with *Debendox* and *pertussis* vaccine, also unjustly condemned?

A massive study of backache in middle aged Dutch women has provided further evidence that those with osteoarthritis are least likely to have osteoporosis (*Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases* 1991;50:158-66). Unsurprisingly, the strongest predictor of back pain in the future was back pain in the past. x Ray films of the back were of no value in predicting future episodes of back pain.

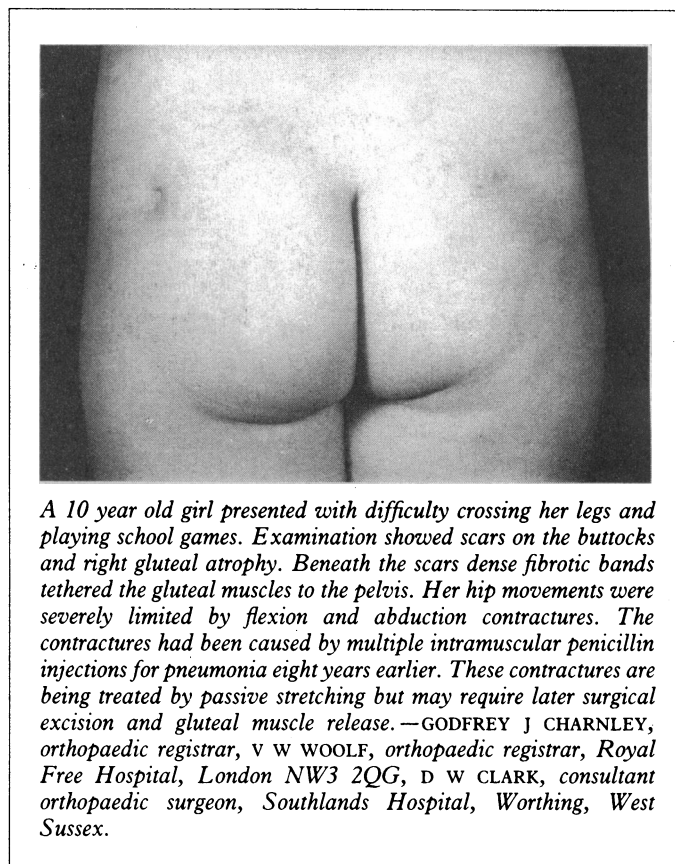
Some patients who need bypass grafts for coronary artery disease have no suitable saphenous veins or internal mammary arteries—the preferred conduits. A review of other possibilities in "Surgery, Gynecology, and Obstetrics" (1991;172:161-74) includes arm veins; the gastroepiploic, splenic, and radial arteries; and prosthetic tubing; and grafts to the coronaries from the internal mammary, subclavian, and innominate arteries; and endarterectomy.

Nearly 1000 homosexual men recruited from advertisements in the gay press and from gay clubs throughout England and Wales were questioned about their sexual experience with women (*AIDS Care* 1990;2:319-24). Around 60% had had sexual contact with women at some time; 11% had had penetrative sex with a woman in the year before the study and 5% in the previous month.

Hardly any people aged 80 or more are left handed as against around 15% of schoolchildren: "Science" (1991;251:742) reports a study by two psychologists suggesting that the explanation is that most left handers die young. On average right handers live as much as nine years longer.

An eight year follow up of 615 patients with impotence treated by self injection of vasoactive drugs has yielded some reassuring data (*Journal of Urology* 1991;145:287-93). From a total of 34 875

recorded injections, only 114 resulted in prolonged erections (51 patients). The reported rate of nodules or permanent deformations was 2.8%.



A 10 year old girl presented with difficulty crossing her legs and playing school games. Examination showed scars on the buttocks and right gluteal atrophy. Beneath the scars dense fibrotic bands tethered the gluteal muscles to the pelvis. Her hip movements were severely limited by flexion and abduction contractures. The contractures had been caused by multiple intramuscular penicillin injections for pneumonia eight years earlier. These contractures are being treated by passive stretching but may require later surgical excision and gluteal muscle release.—GODFREY J CHARNLEY, orthopaedic registrar, V W WOOLF, orthopaedic registrar, Royal Free Hospital, London NW3 2QG, D W CLARK, consultant orthopaedic surgeon, Southlands Hospital, Worthing, West Sussex.

What happens to patients with systemic lupus erythematosus who develop renal failure and are treated by kidney transplantation? They do well, it seems (*Annals of Internal Medicine* 1991;114:183-8). Follow up for eight years of 28 patients in The Netherlands showed an actuarial survival of 87% five years after transplantation; only one patient developed recurrent lupus nephritis.

Minerva was impressed by an article in the "Psychiatric Bulletin" (1991;15:87-8) setting out a strategy for multiple choice examinations with negative marking. In brief, the candidate tots up her score having answered all the questions she is certain about; if she has reached the pass marks she answers no more.

Over the past three decades the prevalence of multiple sclerosis has increased, partly because mortality has declined by about 25% (*Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry* 1991;54:104-9). The decline in mortality has been much greater in Scotland than in England and Wales—possibly yet another clue in the continuing puzzle of the pathogenesis of this disorder.

"Sex in millipedes" is the cover story of the current "Journal of Biological Education"—they copulate for over two hours at a time—but Minerva was more interested in a review (1990;24:229-31) of the archaeobacteria, the third kingdom of living organisms which includes bacteria that prefer to grow in strong acid at 60°C and even some that exist in smouldering slag heaps. Science fact, not fiction, continues to amaze.

MINERVA