

Suicide data are back in the headlines (see *BMJ* 1992;304:1332-3). Rates have risen in the past decade throughout the European Community (EC), especially in men. The United Kingdom has higher rates than most other European countries. Among men aged 15-24 the rate per million rose from 58 in 1974 to 110 in 1988 (*British Journal of Psychiatry* 1992;160:750-6). Throughout the EC, rises in the male suicide rate have correlated closely with rises in unemployment—and the United Kingdom is no exception. Some of the links may be more complex than might at first appear. Having an unemployed father at home, says the report, may compound the burden of joblessness for a young man.

*If suicide rates in the European Community are disturbing then what should be said about rates in the antipodes? According to the "Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry" (1992;26:30-9), the rate in men aged 15-24 is an astounding 240 per million, and suicide is now the cause of one fifth of all deaths in young men. Unemployment is seen as one important factor, but problems with girl friends and within families seemed prominent more often. Psychiatrists confess that that they have no convincing explanation—nor any persuasive remedy.*

Americans for Medical Progress (AMP) is a pressure group set up last year to combat the animal rights movement, and it has recently got a lot of publicity from some aggressive full page advertisements in the *New York Times* showing a rat with the caption "Some people just see a rat. We see a cure for cancer" (*Scientist*, 25 May, p 8). Animal rights groups have assaulted the public with lies and misinformation for the past decade, says AMP, and it asks how many more people will die before the public says no to those campaigners.

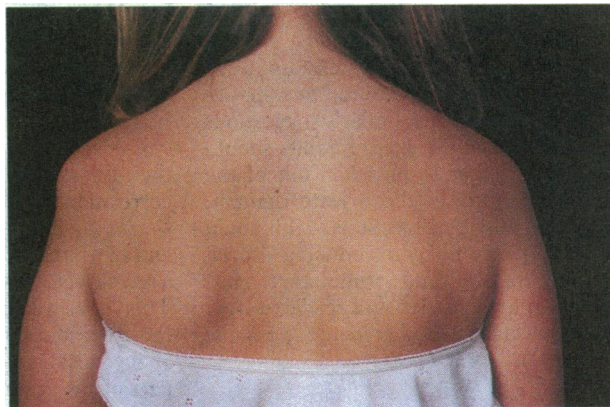
*Two controlled trials reported in the "New England Journal of Medicine" (1992;326:1373-9;1380-4) have concluded that plasmapheresis is of no use in severe lupus nephritis, polymyositis, or dermatomyositis. On the other hand, the procedure is of proved value in conditions including Goodpasture's syndrome, myasthenia gravis, and Waldenstrom's macroglobinaemia. It has taken 10 years of careful clinical trials to sort out the winners from the losers—and the results show how little reliance should be placed on persuasive anecdotal reports.*

Press campaigns in the United States are telling women that their chance of getting breast cancer is one in nine. This figure, much higher than the one in 14 commonly quoted in Britain, has been derived by the American Cancer Society from some theoretical calculations (*Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 1992;84:564). The figure of one in nine is the probability that a woman born in 1992 who lives to be 85 will develop breast cancer at some time in her lifespan. Presumably it takes into account the cancers being detected by mammography, some of which may never progress, and the large number of cancers developing in old age, some of which may need only conservative treatment. The result is that a lot of middle aged women have come to believe that their chance of getting cancer in the next year or two is much higher than is the reality.

*A brief report in "New Scientist" (30 May, p 11) suggests that blood from the umbilical cord may be an alternative to bone marrow as a source of stem cells for bone marrow transplantation. No suitable bone marrow donor was available for treatment of a 3 year old boy with acute leukaemia, so doctors in Paris took unmatched blood from the cord of his newborn sibling. There was no graft versus host reaction, and two years on the boy remains in good health.*

Each year in the United States several thousand passengers take supplementary oxygen while making flights on commercial aircraft (*Chest* 1992;101:1104-13). Nevertheless, airlines are not very keen to

accept passengers for whom oxygen has been recommended; so it is not surprising that more than half of all admissions of passengers to hospital are related to anoxia. Modern aircraft fly with cabin pressures equivalent to an altitude of 2700m, and ever more passengers are elderly. Should oxygen be made more readily available? Doing so might make it possible to complete the process of banning smoking from all types of air travel.



*A girl aged 12 was referred because of a deformity of her left shoulder. Three months earlier she had received an injection of a steroid into her deltoid muscle as a treatment for hay fever. The function of the muscle was unimpaired, and the appearance was thought to be due to fat necrosis. The possibility of unsightly fat necrosis should be borne in mind as a complication of intramuscular injection of steroids.—G J PACKER, registrar, and M A E SHAHEEN, consultant, department of orthopaedic surgery, Hartlepool General Hospital, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS24 9AH.*

Oocyte donation may have become a standard treatment for women with genetic disorders who wish to give birth to a normal child. Obstetricians in Iowa have established a programme of oocyte donation (*Journal of Medical Genetics* 1992;29:398-9) and have treated four women with heritable genetic diseases. Two have given birth to healthy infants, one is pregnant, but the fourth has had several unsuccessful attempts at embryo transfer after in vitro fertilisation.

*The case of the Florida dentist with AIDS is still in the news in the United States. A report in "Science" (1992;256:1130-1) says that the Centers for Disease Control are convinced by analysis of DNA sequences in the HIV from the dentist and his patients that five were infected by him. Intensive investigation, however, has failed to come up with a convincing explanation for the mechanism of infection. It seems not to have been sexual; and the sterilisation procedures in the dentist's surgery were reliable. Yet this remains the only example of transmission of HIV infection from a dentist to his or her patients. The mystery is as deep as ever.*

Estimates by clinicians before delivery of the likely birth weight of a baby are often substantially adrift despite the use of data from ultrasound measurements. Asking the mother may be more reliable (*New England Journal of Medicine* 1992;326:1504). When 93 women who had already had children were asked while in labour to guess the weights of their new babies their average error was only 8% and half were within 5%.