

# Minerva

Further evidence that febrile fits in children do no lasting damage is reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (1998;338:1723-8). A population based study of nearly 400 children showed that, at age 10, children with a history of febrile fits did just as well as the rest at a battery of intellectual and behavioural tests. The 94 children with complex or serial fits did equally well.

The *BMJ* gets permission in writing before publishing any material that might identify a patient, but we have no special policy on family trees (probably because we don't publish that many). We are not alone, according to a survey in *JAMA* (1998;279:1808-12). Most journals surveyed ignored the issue; even five genetic journals did not ask for consent before publishing pedigrees. The authors conclude that people's privacy is being ignored

The prevalence of multiple sclerosis increases sharply at the border of England and Scotland. World beating rates in Shetland and Orkney have often been blamed, but new data show that rates in Lothian and the Border regions are equally high (*Neurology, Neurosurgery, and Psychiatry* 1998;64:730-5). The investigators speculate that Scots have a genetic susceptibility to multiple sclerosis and that environmental risk factors are less important.

Scientists based at Cambridge in the UK have sequenced the whole genome of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, the enigmatic pathogen that kills more humans than any other (*Nature* 1998;393:537-44). It is the second biggest bacterial genome to have been completely sequenced to date, with nearly four and a half million base pairs and 4000 genes; only *Escherichia coli* is bigger.

Retinal haemorrhages in young children are unlikely to be caused by fits, according to a study of 32 children under 2 years old (*British Journal of Ophthalmology* 1998;82:659-60). All presented after one or more fits, and none had retinal haemorrhages. This means, say the authors, that retinal haemorrhages in a child reported to have had a fit should trigger an investigation into non-accidental injury.

The pituitary may sometimes be the target of an autoimmune disorder. Around 100 cases have been reported since 1962, but some recent research suggests that the condition often goes unrecognised. Tests for autoantibodies to human pituitary cytosol protein gave positive results in six of 21 patients with hypopituitarism and in 10 of



During a gynaecological procedure puzzling bluish lesions were noted on the left forearm of the anaesthetised patient. Methylene blue had been injected intravenously into a running drip in the arm, which had also been used for a blood pressure measuring cuff. Apparently the cuff had cycled during administration of the drug and the high intravascular pressure generated by the inflated cuff had presumably caused extravasation of the dye. The lesions disappeared within 48 hours.

Robert Guintoli, chief resident, obstetrics and gynaecology, Yemi Olufolabi, visiting associate, women's division of anaesthesiology, Duke Medical Centre, Durham, USA.

Submissions for this page should include signed consent to publication from the patient

35 of their relatives compared with three of 44 controls (*Journal of Endocrinology* 1998;157:475-80). Patients with hypopituitarism of unknown cause may have unrecognised autoimmune disease.

Up to half of patients labelled "vegetative" soon after a serious head injury will recover, but how can doctors predict which half? A raft of investigations has been studied with disappointing results, but cerebral magnetic resonance imaging looks more promising (*Lancet* 1998;351:1763-7). In a series of 80 patients 42 were still in a vegetative state a year after the injury. Medical resonance imaging showed that they had more corpus callosum and brainstem injuries than patients who recovered. These and other differences suggest that cerebral magnetic resonance imaging may be the most useful investigation yet for predicting outcome.

Children with cancer should look after their teeth as carefully as diabetic patients look after their feet; treatment can affect dental development, and caries can be a dangerous source of infection. In a series of 60 children from Manchester, UK, nearly half had untreated decay in one or more teeth and only a third had seen a dentist since diagnosis (*Archives of Disease in Childhood* 1998;78:560-1). Only three children were taking fluoride supplements. The researchers advocate dental screening and better links between paediatric oncology units and specialist dental teams.

Laser treatment for disfiguring port wine stains has rescued many children and adults from the trauma of "looking different," but can everyone expect complete clearance? Infants with small lesions on bony areas of the face do best (*British Journal of Dermatology* 1998;138:821-5), location being more important than the size of the lesion or the age of the child. In this series all the children with lesions on the forehead were cured by the first five treatments.

Minerva is far from gender blind and usually attributes bad behaviour of all sorts to the male sex steroid. This controversial approach is legitimised by a special report in *Injury Prevention*, which argues that boys will be boys because of exposure to testosterone in the womb and that social pressures may modify behaviour but won't stop boys hurting themselves (and others) more than girls (1998;4:94-5). The only answer, says the author, is to make everyone's environment safer.

Almost a third of patients discharged from Britain's high security psychiatric hospitals in the early 1980s reoffended within 10 years, according to the first study for 15 years of criminal patterns after discharge (*British Journal of Psychiatry* 1998;172:472-6). Serious or violent offences accounted for a quarter of the convictions. These figures are substantially lower than conviction rates in the earlier cohort, although predictors of criminal behaviour remain the same: age at discharge, previous convictions, and a diagnosis of psychopathic disorder.