



Injury to nerves leads to transient growth disturbance of the nails in the dermatomes supplied by those nerves. A young woman fractured her ulna and injured the ulnar nerve (neuropraxia) while playing camogie (a team fieldsport played in Ireland). The fracture healed after internal fixation, but she developed transient regrowth arrest of the nails in the three ulnar digits. The nails recovered fully as her nerve injury recovered. Nails in the dermatomes supplied by a particular nerve undergo trophic changes when the nerve is injured and recover along with the nerve.

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Patient consent: obtained.

Some people with early Alzheimer's disease are safe on the roads, but some are definitely not. Compared with controls, drivers with dementia declined more quickly in their driving performance over time. Failure to continue passing driving tests was associated with the severity of dementia, increasing age, and lower education (*Neurology* 2008;70:1171-8).

Maimonides (1138-1204), philosopher, rabbi, and physician, may have coined the concept of patient centred medicine. He wrote about the conflict between the current treatment for depression—alcohol—and the difficulties for Muslim patients of taking this medical advice. Ultimately, he left it to the patient to decide what to do (*American Journal of Psychiatry* 2008;165:425-8).

Medical musicians from Boston are closing the 25th season of the Longwood Symphony Orchestra in London, with three concerts to benefit UK medical charities. It's the first time the orchestra has performed outside Massachusetts, and one of the four venues is the Great Hall at St Bartholomew's Hospital. Aaron Copland, Samuel Barber, and Ralph Vaughan Williams are all on the bill. For more information go to www.longwoodsymphony.org

The stroma—the tissue in which a tumour arises—offers up clues about the outcome for patients with breast cancer, according to scientists in *Nature Medicine* (published online 27 April 2008; doi: 10.1038/nm1764). The clues are found in the gene expression in the connective tissue around

the tumour, which helps predict how aggressive the tumour is and the likely response to treatment. The gene “signature” in the tumour's stroma can help classify the tumours by clinical outcome and is independent of other prognostic factors.

“Acopia” (inability to cope) is familiar medical slang to Minerva, but a little outdated. “Social admission” and “atypical presentation” are two of the more commonly used and politically correct phrases in current use, but the underlying attitudes towards patients admitted for these reasons are the same. Arguably it's the doctors who feel overwhelmed and “acopic” when dealing with unhelpful patients who present with multiple problems rather than just one neat one (*Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 2008;101:168-74).

Smoking during pregnancy has been shown to be linked to septal and right sided cardiac obstructive defects in offspring, in addition to prematurity and lower birth weight (*Pediatrics* 2008;121:e810-6). The cardiac defects were more strongly linked with heavy smoking, and this relation seems to be independent of alcohol use, taking vitamins before pregnancy, mother's age, and ethnicity. Passive smoking was not an issue.

Just as doctors need holidays from caring for patients, regular holidays for carers are essential. A US evaluation of the benefits—or otherwise—of “assisted vacations” for men with dementia and their caregiving spouses reports that the emotional and physical states of the participants were significantly better than in the control

group, and these effects were both immediate and longer lasting. The authors say the benefits are a worthwhile goal for communities working to reduce caregivers' burden (*Gerontologist* 2008;48:115-20).

Midwives are making a dramatic comeback in Latin America, particularly in Mexico, where they had been sidelined from the mainstream during the 20th century. We're now being told that midwives “can meet the clinical and cultural needs of mothers and newborns”; in Mexico, this means a move away from immobility and feet in stirrups during childbirth and towards more traditional and culturally appropriate care for women in its large indigenous population, who prefer moving around during childbirth (*Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 2008;86:244-5).

Eating a bar of chocolate a day is not a typical healthy way to protect your heart, but researchers at the University of East Anglia will be asking postmenopausal women with type 2 diabetes to do just that. The flavonoids in cocoa are known to reduce risk factors for heart disease but are usually destroyed when chocolate is made. The chocolate in this study has been specially created by a Belgian chocolatier and contains a higher than usual dose of flavonoids, together with soy, which also contains the compounds. To volunteer or find out more, email flavo@use.ac.uk

A new online personalised tool for assessing the risk of inherited breast or ovarian cancer is available, thanks to Macmillan Cancer support. The need arose partly because of the unnecessary anxiety aroused in people who have a relative with cancer and overestimate their risk of inherited cancers. OPERA—Online Personal Education and Risk Assessment—can be accessed at www.macmillan.org.uk/genetics.

An attempt to provide an outreach service for people with personality disorder had some interesting outcomes. Though this pilot service reached only 13 patients, all clusters of personality disorder were represented. The feedback for future service designers was that not only does such a service need to develop expertise in all clusters, but there's a need to moderate the harsh, self critical attitudes of the care coordinators themselves—which could be due to natural selection, or a direct result of dealing with such patients (*Psychiatric Bulletin* 2008;32:127-30).