New evidence suggests that women may be more at risk than men of Alzheimer’s disease, say US researchers. They have found a genetic variant on the X chromosome that is significantly associated with an increased risk of the disease and is almost entirely restricted to women. The gene in question is called PCDH11X, and it encodes a protein called a protocadherin, which is part of a family of molecules that promote adhesion of cells and signalling in the central nervous system (Nature Genetics published online 11 Jan 2009, doi:10.1038/ng.305).

Simplified caesarean techniques can be performed by lower level health care providers in under resourced areas. Such techniques can be lifesaving for women in obstructed vaginal labour, and they can save millions of mothers’ and babies’ lives each year. One such technique uses a straight transverse abdominal incision, which is higher than Pfannenstiel’s incision; manual dissection of the abdominal wall layers; a transverse incision of the myometrium not larger than the amniotic sac; closure of the uterus in a single layer; and non-closure of the peritoneum. The outcomes are good and the procedure is safe (BJOG 2009;116:247-56; doi:10.1111/j.1471-0528.2008.02046.x).

What’s better for young babies undergoing heart surgery—to receive reconstituted fresh whole blood or standard blood component therapy? According to a randomised controlled trial, transfusion of fresh blood from the start of surgery and cardiopulmonary bypass, and if needed during the first 24 hours after bypass, results in significantly less postoperative chest tube volume loss, lower ventilation times, shorter hospital stays, and reduced need for inotropic drugs (Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery 2008;136:1442-9, doi:10.1016/j.jtcvs.2008.08.044).

We may like to think that we would stand up to racist bullies, but social experiments reported in Science indicate that in real life this may not be so (2009;323:276-8, doi:10.1126/science.1164951). The research showed that although people said they would be upset by a racist act, they showed relatively little emotional distress when they experienced such an event. The research also showed that we have a tendency to overestimate the degree to which a racist comment would provoke social rejection of the racist. We may actually respond with indifference rather than action.

When talking about being awarded a joint Nobel Prize in Medicine last year for identifying HIV as the cause of AIDS, Françoise Barré-Sinoussi said she felt an enormous responsibility. The crucial message, she said, was is to get fresh blood working on HIV—“new spirit” is needed if we want to develop creative and novel strategies for a vaccine, and that means bringing in scientists from areas other than virology, such as immunology and nanotechnology (Bulletin of the World Health Organization 2009;87:10-1, doi:10.2471/BLT.09.040109).

One year after 1570 involuntary admissions to 22 psychiatric hospitals in England, 15% of patients had been readmitted involuntarily, and 40% of them thought their original admission had been justified. Half of the patients were interviewed within the first week of the first admission. Greater satisfaction with their initial treatment, poorer global function around the time of the first admission, and living alone were factors associated with more positive retrospective views of the admission (British Journal of Psychiatry 2009;194:49-54, doi:10.1192/bjp.bp.108.052266).

As a pre-emptive strike against pain in patients having anterior cruciate ligament reconstruction under general anaesthetic, anaesthetists gave a femoral nerve block to 31 volunteers and saline placebo injections to 25 control patients. All patients received a local injection of bupivacaine and intravenous ketorolac at wound closure. Although no complications were seen with the femoral nerve block, it had no clinical benefits. Routine use of such interventions cannot be recommended for this surgical procedure (American Journal of Sports Medicine 2009;37:78-86, doi:10.1177/0363546508324311).

Oatmeal gruel, gooseberry thorns, and unsalted butter are just three of the 1153 traditional cures mentioned in a paper that comes with a “health warning” (Ulster Medical Journal 2009;78:26-33, www.ums.ac.uk/journal. html). Some of the cures mentioned are “at the least mildly alarming, and some likely to be downright dangerous.” The archived data from 1965, mostly reflecting experience from the early 20th century, reveal much about curing in social groups that—in the absence of freely available health care, and at a time when medical knowledge was less well developed than it is now—had to be fairly self reliant when facing illness.