

“*Les antibiotiques, c’est pas automatique*” was the title of a campaign launched in France in 2002 designed to tackle the overprescribing of antibiotics. It has been repeated every winter since. But 10 years on, France remains one of Europe’s biggest consumers of antibiotics. One reason, says a clinician, is that doctors are afraid they will lose patients and so yield to pressure from them to prescribe the drugs. Another cites lazy thinking: “this may not do the patient any good, but it certainly won’t hurt him” (*Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 2011;89:8-9, doi:10.2471/BLT.11.030111).

Shift working is a recognised risk factor for breast cancer, and this link has been attributed to its disruptive effects on circadian rhythms and sleep deprivation at night. Now an analysis in *Chronobiology International* reports that exposure to “light at night” in the sleeping environment is significantly associated with breast cancer risk, not just exposure to artificial light in the working environment (2011;28:76-80, doi:10.3109/07420528.2010.531490). Bedroom shutters and blackout blinds may turn out to be very important.

Minerva sometimes bemoans students’ obsession with assessment to the exclusion of learning, but was cheered to read one bright medical student had taken an evidence based approach to his studies. In an essay entitled “Does scepticism help you pass med school exams?” he reflects on the discovery that students who question their multiple choice answers have been shown to improve their marks and performance. He argues that questioning the answers should help medical students to hone their critical analysis skills ([www.healthwatch-uk.org](http://www.healthwatch-uk.org)).

One reason for the poor response to treatment of diarrhoea dominant irritable bowel syndrome may be that most people who present with it actually have other conditions, proposes an article in *Medical Hypotheses* (2011;76:97-9, doi:10.1016/j.mehy.2010.08.040). A retrospective study of 303 patients with an initial presentation of diarrhoea dominant irritable bowel syndrome found that 98% of them were eventually diagnosed with something else; 68% had conditions related to treatable bile acid abnormalities. Almost all the



An 89 year old woman was started on chloramphenicol eye drops. Over two weeks of treatment she developed worsening periorcular scaling, erythema, and an allergic conjunctivitis. The appearance of the skin was characteristic of a severe contact dermatitis and extended where drops had run down her cheek. Topical chloramphenicol allergy has been estimated to affect one in 200 people. Although several reports have confirmed the allergenic properties of chloramphenicol itself, the preservative phenylmercuric nitrate is often the causative ingredient. Substantial hypersensitivity tends to occur only after protracted exposure, and the problem usually resolves after withdrawal of the inciting medication.

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Patient consent obtained from next of kin.

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patients responded to appropriate treatment, leading the authors to wonder whether diarrhoea dominant irritable bowel syndrome (or “functional diarrhoea”) really exists.

Hip resurfacing is now regularly used to treat young and active patients with painful arthritis of the hip, and most places that perform resurfacing have reported 5 year results. A single surgeon’s follow-up of 144 consecutive cases over 10 years confirms that metal-on-metal hip resurfacing using the Birmingham hip provides a hard wearing alternative to hip replacement, particularly in younger men with osteoarthritis. Only 10 revisions were needed during the follow-up and the 10 year prosthetic survival rate was 98%, with a high level of function (*Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery* 2011;93-B:27-33, doi:10.1302/0301-620X.93B1.24134).



**A 55 year old man with pink, nodules and plaques on his neck, face, and chest**  
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Our choice of friends may not be as random as we suppose. Scientists exploring the interplay of genes and human relationships found correlations between friends for two of the six tested genetic markers, and the link remained after accounting for geographical area. People with the *DRD2* marker (associated with alcoholism) tended to befriend other *DRD2* positive peers—but people who carry a gene that has been linked with an open personality, *CYP2A6*, were friends with those who lacked the gene (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 2011, doi:10.1073/pnas.1011687108).

A qualitative study of teenage girls both vaccinated and unvaccinated against human papillomavirus (HPV) found that their understanding of HPV was poor. Some were unclear about their own risk, some were worried about the vaccine’s novelty, and some didn’t trust the information they’d been given. The researchers suggest that school based interventions might be a helpful supplement to leaflets and should focus on improving knowledge about HPV and the purpose of the vaccine (*Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care* 2011;37:22-5, doi:10.1136/jfprhc.2010.0017).

The Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland saw a 7% rise in calls from UK based doctors in 2010. Recent high profile negligence cases seem to have raised doctor’s awareness of risk, leading them to be more proactive in seeking help about potential problems and to ask for assistance at an earlier stage. Hot topics of concern included confidentiality and problems with colleagues ([www.mddus.com](http://www.mddus.com)).

Another long follow-up study looks at the duration of relationships and mental health outcomes over 30 years (*British Journal of Psychiatry* 2011;198:24-30, doi:10.1192/bjp.bp.110.083550). In this birth cohort of 30 year olds, longer relationship duration was significantly associated with lower rates of depression, suicidal behaviour, and substance abuse, even after adjustment for other factors. No differences were noted between the sexes, and it didn’t make any difference whether the relationships were legal or de facto marriages.

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