



A 53 year old man with an itchy red rash
Try the picture quiz in
ENDGAMES, p 1279

Routine screening for developmental dysplasia of the hip in cases of both postural and congenital talipes equinovarus deformity is no longer necessary, according to an 11 year prospective longitudinal observational study in the *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery* (2009;91-B:655-8, doi:10.1302/0301-620X.91B5.22117). The reason given is that developmental dysplasia of the hip is poorly defined, leading to overdiagnosis of what is essentially a “spurious condition.” On the other hand, ultrasound imaging and hip surveillance in babies with congenital talipes calcaneovalgus, and possibly those with metatarsus adductus, should continue.

Could the addition of lithium to drinking water help lower the risk of suicide in the general population? A Japanese study of lithium in tap water helps to elucidate the answer. Lithium concentrations were significantly and negatively associated with standard mortality rate averages for suicide from 2002 to 2006. The authors suggest that even very low levels of lithium in drinking water may have a role in reducing the risk of suicide (*British Journal of Psychiatry* 2009;194:464-5, doi:10.192/bjp.bp.108.055798).

Another Japanese study looks at the delicate subject of how Japanese families view the disclosure of terminal illness, in this case iatrogenic HIV infection (*AIDS Care* 2009;21:422-30, doi:10.1080/09540120802282578). In deference to families’ wishes, in Japan patients are not usually told that they have a terminal illness. But despite the stigma attached to HIV in Japan, relatives of patients with haemophilia who died as a result of iatrogenic HIV infection said that most doctors informed the patients too late, and in cases where the doctor did not express regret they blamed the doctor personally for the infection and the death.

A prestigious design award has gone to three young designers who have come up with a new product—nicotine shower gel—in the war against cigarette smoking. Unlike some quitting strategies, the shower gel doesn’t upset anyone’s daily routine, and it is part of a range of products (also including deodorant and lip balm) that contain controlled doses of nicotine from 2 mg up to 16 mg for a once daily dose (www.thersa.org). Minerva hopes the shower gel doesn’t leave the alluring aroma of cigarettes that lingers on some smokers.



A 65 year old man with diabetes and established microvascular complications presented with arm pain and splinter haemorrhages in his left hand. Multiple blood cultures and an echocardiogram excluded infective endocarditis and a vasculitic screen was negative. A computed tomographic angiogram showed marked atheromas around the origin of the left subclavian artery with occlusive thrombus and atheromas in other vascular trees. His risk factors were addressed and he had a good clinical response to warfarin. A rare sign like splinter haemorrhage can be caused by a common condition such as atherosclerosis. Aggressive lipid management and prevention of embolic events is the mainstay of treatment.

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Thalidomide probably caused birth defects by stopping the growth of new blood vessels, say Scottish scientists. When a synthetic thalidomide analogue was applied to chick and zebrafish embryos, cultured mouse heart cells, and a line of human cells, the growth of new blood vessels was halted, especially in limb buds. This evidence fits with the use of thalidomide as an anti-cancer drug in suppressing angiogenesis. And the cellular events affected happen before any of those previously thought to be linked to birth defects, explaining how the defects occurred in such a short time window (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 2009; published online May 11, doi:10.1073/pnas.0901505106).

Do we care about continuity of care? An editorial in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* says that we used to, and it depended on doctors’

accumulated experience (not available from a textbook) and the availability of suitable patient accommodation (2009;102:168-9, doi:10.1258/jrsm.2009.090119). Continuity of care needs continuity of learning, but its loss cannot simply be pinned to the cutting of excessive hours of work. A reduction in consultant involvement is also critical to the loss of continuity. Insufficient numbers of inpatient beds is another factor. The editorial calls for stronger medical leadership before continuity is lost altogether.

The law in Vietnam requires motorcyclists to wear helmets—but this law seems to be adhered to better by adults than by the children riding with them. Younger children wear helmets even less than older children. Fear of neck injuries seems to be the chief reason children were not made to wear helmets. Erroneous public perceptions need to be tackled and legislation that penalises adults whose children are not wearing helmets may also be necessary (*Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 2009; 87:369-73 doi:10.2471/BLT.08.057109).

Do magnetic resonance scans identify acute meniscal tears just as well as they do chronic ones? A Finnish study of 628 young military personnel who underwent magnetic resonance imaging and arthroscopy of the knee over six years found that diagnostic validity of magnetic imaging was similar in acute and chronic situations. Acute tears were identified with a sensitivity of 67%, specificity of 93%, and diagnostic accuracy of 88%; the corresponding values for chronic tears were 64%, 91%, and 86% respectively. Effusions and haemarthroses did not weaken the diagnostic validity of scanning (*American Journal of Sports Medicine* 2009; 37:1003-8, doi:10.1177/0363546508329543).

A randomised controlled trial of oropharyngeal cleansing with 0.2% chlorhexidine to prevent pneumonia in critically ill patients found chlorhexidine to be no better than the control solution, potassium permanganate. What became apparent, however, was that the incidence of nosocomial pneumonia fell during the study period, suggesting that meticulous oral hygiene in intensive care patients may be more important than the type of cleansing agent used (*Chest* 2009;135:1150-6, doi:10.1378/chest.08-1321).

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