



**A congenital anomaly in a preterm newborn**  
**Try the picture quiz in**  
**ENDGAMES, p 159**

The United States' epidemic of obesity arguably comes down to a single issue: increased food energy supply. Researchers predicted changes in weight based on changes in estimated energy intake in children and adults between the 1970s and 2000s. For children the measured weight gain and the predicted weight gain were identical at 4 kg. For adults the measured weight gain was 8.6 kg and the predicted weight gain was 10.8 kg. The authors say public health approaches to obesity must tackle the factors that drive increased energy intake (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 2009;90:1453-6, [www.ajcn.org](http://www.ajcn.org)).

Highly paid professional goalkeepers prefer to dive left and right for penalty shoot-outs, even though staying still actually stops many more goals. A few (evidence based) goalies study videos of their opponents and do not dive for effect, but they face more criticism. Similarly, a midwife proposes that "action bias"—the need to appear heroic by doing something, rather than using watchful waiting—might be one of the numerous factors contributing to the rising rate of caesarean sections. Routine interventions such as hospital delivery, episiotomy, rupture of membranes, and caesareans are hard to reduce even when they cause more harm than good (*MIDIRS Midwifery Digest* 2009;19:495-9).

A GP on telephone triage duty was found to be negligent when, instead of arranging to see a floppy baby immediately, she said she would do a home visit when her surgery was finished. Three hours after the distraught mother had called the surgery, the doctor found that the baby almost certainly had meningococcal septicaemia and rushed him to hospital without starting treatment. The baby survived but lost some toes. The GP's medical notes did not include her telephone conversation with the mother ([www.medicalprotection.org/uk/casebook-september-2009/too-little-too-late](http://www.medicalprotection.org/uk/casebook-september-2009/too-little-too-late)).

Previous exposure to the seasonal influenza vaccine boosts the effectiveness of vaccination against the 2009 A/H1N1 influenza virus in ferrets. The authors say that ferrets are a reliable animal for modelling the efficacy of influenza vaccines in humans. In this study, ferrets that were given seasonal flu vaccines one month before the H1N1 vaccine showed stronger antibody responses to H1N1 than those vaccinated against H1N1 alone. The authors can't



A 37 year old woman presented with weight gain. Biochemical investigations indicated autoimmune hypothyroidism. A midline lesion was noted in the distal third of her tongue, and biopsies confirmed congenital ectopic lingual thyroid. Neck ultrasound showed the thyroid gland in its normal location. Lingual thyroid is caused by incomplete descent of the thyroid tissue through the thyroglossal duct between the third and seventh week of gestation. Most patients are asymptomatic. Levothyroxine is used to correct hypothyroidism and to shrink the gland, and surgery or ablative radioiodine is considered when there are symptoms of obstruction or bleeding.

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Patient consent obtained.

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yet explain why the seasonal vaccine doesn't protect against H1N1 yet seems to enhance the immune response (*Science Translational Medicine* 2009;1:12re1, doi:10.1126/scitranslmed.3000564).

A study in *Chest* was designed to address the observation that increased air pollution levels are associated with more frequent use of rescue inhalers (2009;136:1529-36, doi:10.1378/chest.08-1463). Up to now it's not been clear whether air pollution causes worse symptom severity or whether it decreases the efficacy of rescue inhalers. Children with asthma who had been recently exposed to outdoor air pollutants had a reduced response to inhaled short acting  $\beta$  agonists compared with those who had not been exposed, suggesting that impairment of rescue inhalers is to blame for the adverse effects of pollution on asthma control.

The closing date for the new International Hippocrates Prize for poetry and medicine is fast approaching: 31 January 2010. There is an open category for any UK or international member of the public and a separate award for current or former NHS related staff and students, both attracting prizes of £5000. Medicine is to be interpreted in the widest sense, and "poetry as therapy" is just one aspect. The awards are supported by the University of Warwick's medical school and the University's Writing Programme. For more information visit [www.hippocrates-poetry.org](http://www.hippocrates-poetry.org).

Appendiceal faecaliths are associated with right iliac fossa pain. Of 203 removed appendixes with normal histology, 26 (13%) were found to have faecaliths inside. Just 5% of the patients who had had faecaliths had recurrent pain after surgery, compared with almost half of those who did not have faecaliths. None of the faecalith group needed to be readmitted with right iliac fossa pain, but 19% of the control group were (*Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons of England* (2010;92:61-4, doi:10.1308/003588410X12518836439524).

"Hotly debated" plans for a crematorium in a leafy shire in England are given a public airing in *Pharos International* (the official journal of the cremation society of Great Britain; Winter 2009). The proposed grounds are also being fought over by a group who want to build a nine hole pitch-and-putt golf course. The local mayor is reported as saying that a crematorium would solve the burning issue of the area's dwindling burial land.

The *BMJ* Christmas 2009 issue included a review of the great Spanish influenza pandemic, with material taken from the newly digitalised *BMJ* archives. One study was by Sir William Leishman (director of pathology at the War Office), on the efforts to immunise 60 thousand British troops at the end of the Great War with a highly successful "catharral" vaccine. The review's authors want more information about the study methods used, so they can interpret the data, but they've drawn blanks at the National Archives, the Wellcome Foundation, and the Royal Army Medical Corps Museum. If anyone knows the whereabouts of Leishman's war diaries for 1918 please contact Tom Jefferson ([jefferson.tom@gmail.com](mailto:jefferson.tom@gmail.com)).

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