

## EDITORIALS

- 221 **Synaesthesia**  
Is a common and harmless perceptual condition, says David M Eagleman  
» *Practice*, p 261
- 222 **Home based cardiac rehabilitation**  
An effective way of widening access to preventive services, says Alexander M Clark  
» *Research*, p 249
- 223 **Smoking cessation**  
It is never too late for people to stop, even when they have lung cancer, say Tom Treasure and Janet Treasure  
» *Research*, p 251
- 224 **Preoperative non-invasive stress testing**  
Should be reserved for patients at high risk of perioperative cardiac complications, says Davy Cheng  
» *Research*, p 252
- 225 **High reliability in health care**  
Examples from other industries should be informative, not prescriptive, say Charles Vincent, Jonathan Benn, and George B Hanna

## LETTERS

- 227 **Bad medicine: pain**
- 228 **Thrombolysis in stroke**
- 229 **Primary care's lost cause?**
- 230 **Fever as nature's engine**

## NEWS

- 231 **Rotavirus vaccine cuts deaths of Mexican babies from diarrhoea by 40%, shows study**  
All hospital patients should be assessed for risk of clots, NICE says
- 232 **Use Tamiflu leftover from swine flu pandemic to grit icy roads, MP says**  
England's chlamydia screening programme is patchy and inept
- 233 **Demise of sibutramine leaves EU doctors with only one obesity drug**  
Drinks companies delayed report of marketing practices
- 234 **GSK makes details of potential antimalarials freely available**  
Editor earned \$20m in royalties and \$2m in fees from device manufacturer  
Decision to dismiss head of German NICE is "shabby," says MP
- 235 **Election of Republican senator derails US healthcare reform**
- 236 **NHS pay rise may be capped below 1% for the next few years**  
Palestinian doctor's tragedy prompts Gaza education plans  
Journalists and digital storytellers vie for health award
- 237 **Contaminated cell lines may imperil some cancer research**

## SHORT CUTS

- 238 **What's new in the other general journals**

## FEATURES

- 240 **How can child and maternal mortality be cut?**  
With only five years to go, the millennium development goals to reduce maternal and child mortality remain a long way off target. Tatum Anderson looks at the problems

## OBSERVATIONS

- 243 **YANKEE DOODLING**  
**US healthcare reform is in the dustbin**  
Douglas Kamerow
- 244 **Blogs and postings from bmj.com and doc2doc**

## ANALYSIS

- 245 **NICE and new: appraising innovation**  
Innovation is essential in drug development but is not cheap. Robin Ferner, Dyfrig Hughes, and Jeffrey Aronson examine the challenges of encouraging innovation while ensuring clinical benefit

## RESEARCH

- 248 **Research highlights: the pick of BMJ research papers this week**
- 249 **Home based versus centre based cardiac rehabilitation: Cochrane systematic review and meta-analysis**  
Hasnain M Dalal, Anna Zawada, Kate Jolly, Tiffany Moxham, Rod S Taylor  
» *Editorial*, p 222
- 250 **Treatment of childhood obesity by retraining eating behaviour: randomised controlled trial**  
Anna L Ford, Cecilia Bergh, Per Södersten, Matthew A Sabin, Sandra Hollinghurst, Linda P Hunt, Julian P H Shield
- 251 **Influence of smoking cessation after diagnosis of early stage lung cancer on prognosis: systematic review of observational studies with meta-analysis**  
A Parsons, A Daley, R Begh, P Aveyard  
» *Editorial*, p 223
- 252 **Non-invasive cardiac stress testing before elective major non-cardiac surgery: population based cohort study**  
Duminda N Wijeyesundera, W Scott Beattie, Peter C Austin, Janet E Hux, Andreas Laupacis  
» *Editorial*, p 224
- 253 **Screening for postnatal depression in primary care: cost effectiveness analysis**  
Mike Paulden, Stephen Palmer, Catherine Hewitt, Simon Gilbody



Editorial, p 221; Practice, p 261



Republican win and US reform, pp 235, 243



Millennium development goals, p 240

Encouraging innovations and clinical benefit, p 245

**CLINICAL REVIEW**

**254 Managing and preventing depression in adolescents**  
 This review provides guidance for non-specialists on the assessment and management of adolescent unipolar depression and considers emerging evidence on prevention strategies.  
 Anita Thapar, Stephan Collishaw, Robert Potter, Ajay K Thapar

**PRACTICE**

**259 GUIDELINES**  
**Reducing the risk of venous thromboembolism in patients admitted to hospital: summary of NICE guidance**  
 Jennifer Hill, Tom Treasure, On behalf of the National Clinical Guideline Centre for Acute and Chronic Conditions

**261 A PATIENT'S JOURNEY**  
**Synaesthesia**  
 This patient has lived with synaesthesia since childhood, but the condition was diagnosed only when she sought help for depression  
 Anonymous, Steve Logsdail  
*» Editorial, p 221*

**OBITUARIES**

**263 Donald Acheson**  
 Former English chief medical officer who fought to contain the new AIDS epidemic

**264 John George Banton; Frederick Nii Lomote Engmann; James Kerr Finlayson; Stanley Leighton Orr Jackson; Bernard Vincent Lee; Paul Schleijsen; William Francis Toomey**

**VIEWS AND REVIEWS**

**PERSONAL VIEW**  
**265 Leadership with a small "l"**  
 Richard Bohmer

**REVIEW OF THE WEEK**  
**266 Boxing clever**  
 John Quin

**BETWEEN THE LINES**  
**267 A man without gaiety**  
 Theodore Dalrymple

**ROUND TABLE**  
**267 The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference**  
 by Malcolm Gladwell  
 Katharine Thomas

**COLUMNISTS**  
**268 Pay of distinction**  
 Des Spence

**In praise of cows**  
 Liam Farrell

**ENDGAMES**

**269 Quiz page for doctors in training**

**MINERVA**

**270 The danger of kites and other stories**

**FILLERS**

**262 Histoptysis or oncoptysis: suggested terms for tissue expectoration**



Depression in adolescents, p 254



Donald Acheson has died, p 263



In praise of cows, p 268

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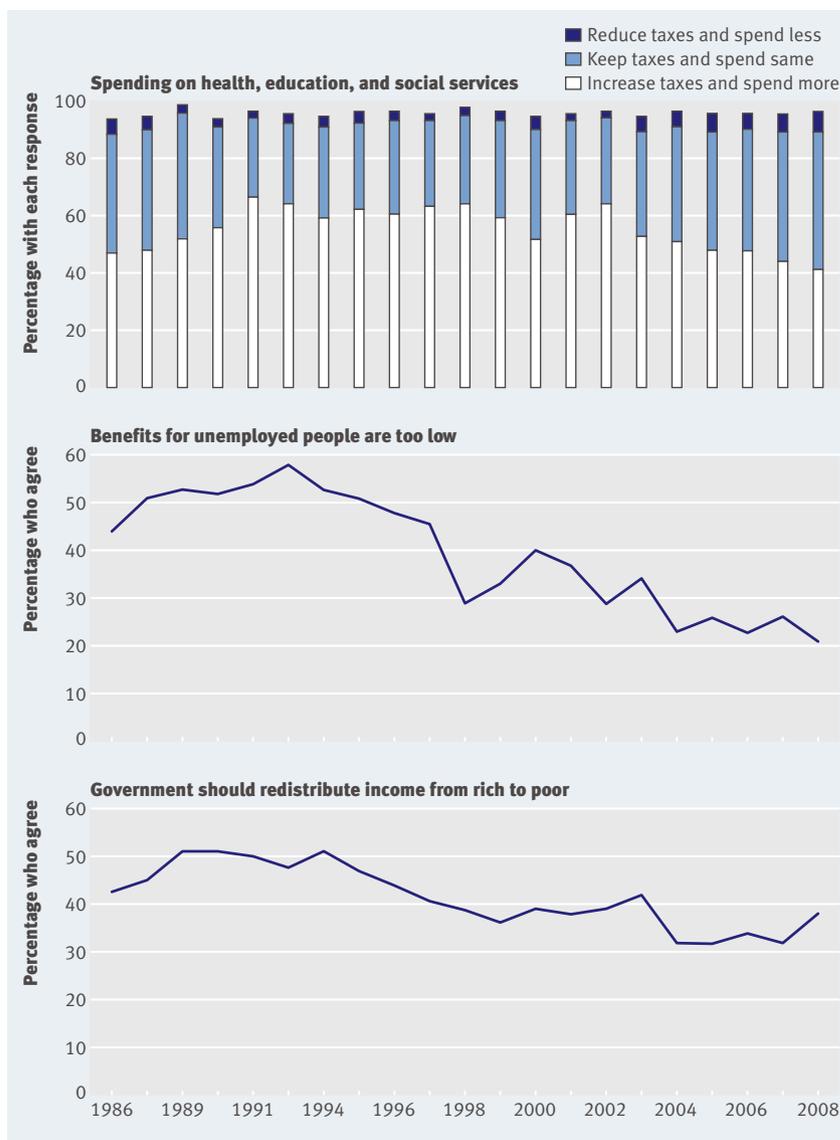
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## GRAPHIC OF THE WEEK

Changes in British values over two decades, from the 26th survey of British social attitudes by the independent National Centre for Social Research. Each year it asks about 3000 people what it's like to live in Britain and how they think Britain is run. The survey tracks people's changing social, political, and moral views and informs the development of public policy. See [www.natcen.ac.uk](http://www.natcen.ac.uk)

## THE WEEK IN NUMBERS

**1-6%** Proportion of adolescents affected worldwide each year by depression (**Clinical Review**, p 254)

**25 000** Deaths in England each year attributable to hospital acquired venous thromboembolism (**Practice**, p 259)

**45 g** Fall in mean self determined meal size of participants who use a Mandometer (**Research**, p 250)

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“Unless an alternative use can be found for them [the unused oseltamivir tablets], the government stands condemned. They would be great for gritting the icy roads”

Paul Flynn, Labour MP for Newport West, who filed an early day motion in the House of Commons on 20 January to highlight concerns about the intended mass use of Tamiflu in the UK (**News**, p 232)

## EDITOR'S CHOICE

## Seeing things differently

**As well as being fascinating, it turns out to be common—one in a hundred of us is a synaesthete.**

**And if you don't know what it is, you might mistake it for something serious.**

Synaesthesia is a harmless condition for which patients almost never seek medical help. So why have we got an article and an editorial about it? Because as well as being fascinating, it turns out to be common—one in a hundred of us is a synaesthete. And if you don't know what it is, you might mistake it for something serious. As David Eagleman beautifully evokes in his editorial (p 221), synaesthesia is “a fusion of different sensory perceptions: the feeling of sandpaper might evoke an F sharp, a symphony might be experienced in blues and golds, or the concept of February might be experienced above the right shoulder.”

Most synaesthetes accept the reality presented to them as entirely normal, as we all do. But Eagleman says that doctors, parents, and educators need to be aware of the condition so they don't show inappropriate concern when hearing someone give what seems to be an unusual description of the world. The author of our Patient Journey (p 261) sought medical help for depression and had an MRI scan after reporting difficulty recognising words, which she described as visual loss. As a child she had stopped telling people that she saw numbers as colours after a friend called her weird. Luckily her psychiatrist, who writes an accompanying commentary, understood the difference between her symptoms and schizophrenia. “Had I been diagnosed with schizophrenia, my life would have changed greatly,” writes the patient.

There's another interesting little oddity in this week's *BMJ*—a letter reporting some in vitro research. Following up discussions in the journal about fever possibly being a beneficial response to infection, Garth Dixon and colleagues summarise their experiments on *N meningitidis* incubated in whole

blood (p 230). They found reduced bacterial growth at higher temperatures and conclude that antipyretic treatment may be counterproductive.

No doubt new antipyretics are being developed as I write. But will they be sufficiently innovative and useful to merit the spending of public money? Robin Ferner and colleagues point out that only about one new drug in eight provides average health gains of more than 1 QALY. We badly need innovation in drug development, but the NHS should pay over the odds for new drugs only if they benefit patients, they say. Where such benefit is uncertain, the costs of stimulating and rewarding innovation should fall to drug companies and to the department for business, innovation, and skills.

Finally, we celebrate the life and achievements of Donald Acheson, England's former chief medical officer, who died three weeks ago (p 263). Despite his Calvinist upbringing, he instinctively understood that secrecy and shame would fuel the spread of AIDS. In the UK he effectively marshalled politicians and the media, getting ministers to drop plans for compulsory testing and to promote harm minimisation as the main message. So we have needle exchanges and encouragement of safe sex rather than no sex. Internationally he developed programmes for AIDS prevention. Without his courage and insight, things would have been very different.

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Career Focus, jobs, and courses appear after p 268

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