



A 76 year old woman with a burning, tingling rash
Try the picture quiz in
ENDGAMES, p 269

Social isolation and being prone to mental health problems are just two of the issues faced by families led by single mothers. The effect on eight single mothers attending the intervention arm of a community based education and support group programme was assessed in the context of a larger randomised controlled study. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis revealed that after attending the group, these mothers identified improved self-esteem, improved support from other mothers, improved parenting skills, and improved communication with their children (*BMC Public Health* 2010;10:4, doi:10.1186/1471-2458-10-4).

Kite strings can cause serious injuries, including electrocution, when wet and caught in power lines. Kites are banned during festive seasons in parts of Asia, where important events are often celebrated by kite flying. A motorcyclist sustained a fractured humerus and a lacerated internal jugular vein when a kite string flowed across the road. He survived to tell the tale, but the authors of this case report say that such injuries are greatly under-represented in medical literature and the hazards should be more heavily publicised (*Injury* 2009, doi:10.1016/j.injury.2009.09.005).

A 70 year old man with slurred speech after a stroke presented several times to four different GPs over three months with dysuria, urinary incontinence, and a split urine stream. His urine was dipped each time and he was prescribed antibiotics on four occasions, but no infective organism was cultured and no physical examinations were recorded. After he mentioned that the tip of his penis was sore, he was non-urgently referred to urology. A large ulcerated mass that was found near the external urethral meatus proved to be a fatal invasive squamous cell carcinoma (*Casebook* January 2010 www.medicalprotection.org/uk/casebook-september-2009/case-reports/Dysphasia-dysuria-disaster).

The Nintendo Wii Balance Board (WBB) has been put through rigorous validity and reliability tests for standing balance and came out with flying colours compared with the current gold standard laboratory grade "force platform" (*Gait and Posture* 2009; published online 11 December, doi:10.1016/j.gaitpost.2009.11.012). The authors conclude that the WBB is a valid tool for assessing



Describing skin disorders accurately is often a challenge, but a picture can be worth a thousand words, as illustrated by this photograph of the upper back sent to our teledermatology service. A diagnosis of ecthyma gangrenosum was made and confirmed when the patient subsequently attended clinic. Ecthyma has these striking clinical features and is a vasculitic response to infection, usually pseudomonas. It occurs most commonly in immunocompromised hosts; this woman was diabetic. The condition was secondary to direct inoculation of meticillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* by excoriation. It completely resolved after treatment with linezolid, mupirocin ointment, debridement, and occlusive bandaging. Patient consent obtained.

Emma Victoria Smith (dremmasmith@doctors.org.uk), dermatology specialist registrar, Richard J Motley, consultant dermatology and cutaneous surgery, Welsh Institute of Dermatology, Glamorgan House, University Hospital Wales, Heath Park, Cardiff CF14 4XW
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standing balance and because it's a fraction of the cost of a force platform and very portable, it could be just the ticket for the consulting room.

The main purpose of mathematical modelling of infectious disease epidemics is to quantify uncertainty, according to the *British Medical Bulletin*. Early in an outbreak, data are too thin and too likely to be biased to allow estimations of numbers of cases, let alone make predictions about expected case fatality or the proportion likely to need hospital admission. Minerva, who can't decide whether to be relieved about the non-appearance of the H1N1 pandemic or irritated by the over-reaction of governments and agencies, plans to read the article again before deciding (*British Medical Bulletin* 2009;92:33-42, doi:10.1093/bmb/ldp038).

Senegal's holy city of Touba has swollen from a "village" of 5000 residents 45 years ago to a larger "village"—so defined because of its management by a rural department—of over 700 000 today. Apart from attracting Islamic Sufi observers, Touba offers free land and water, but inadequate sanitation, water systems, and septic tanks have resulted in huge issues of waste disposal. Existing sanitation systems are overwhelmed during Magal, an annual pilgrimage to Touba, when cholera is a major threat (*Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 2010;88:7-8, doi:10.2471/BLT.10.020110).

Data from the Whitehall II Study show a link between social position and cortisol secretion in an ageing population. In a cohort whose mean age was 61, lowest social position (according to current or previous occupational grade and wealth) was associated with a more gradual decline of cortisol secretion over one day. The difference in the decline of the slope was notable among men, but not women, and although financial insecurity played a role, the differences were explained primarily by poor health (chiefly smoking) and sleep behaviours (short duration) (*Psychosomatic Medicine* 2010;72:27-34, doi:10.1097/PSY.0b013e3181c85712).

Researchers suggested that intensive insulin treatment might affect forearm blood flow independently of global haemodynamic indicators, despite previous demonstrations that reducing blood sugar below 6 mmol/l has detrimental effects in critically ill patients. Compared with standard treatment the intensive treatment did considerably increase forearm blood flow, but although this effect was weakly related to the insulin dose, it was not related to blood glucose concentration (*Critical Care* 2010;13:R198, doi:10.1186/cc8202).

The quality of children's diets is linked to the timing of puberty, but not to body composition at the onset of puberty, a study in Germany has found (*Journal of Nutrition* 2010;140:95-102, doi:10.3945/jn.109.113365). It showed that children with poorer quality diets entered puberty about 0.4 years earlier than those with healthy diets, leaving them at higher risk of hormone related cancers and later insulin resistance and adiposity. The effect was independent of body mass.

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