

In a medical emergency it's not just doctors who have to make quick, safe decisions; patients too must have the capacity to make appropriate choices. A mnemonic used by doctors in one unit to recall the criteria for assessing decision making capacity is described in *Chest* (2010;137:421-7, doi:10.1378/chest.09-1133). CURVES stands for Choose and Communicate, Understand, Reason, Value, Emergency, Surrogate. The authors say this memory aid not only helps them make quick decisions about giving treatment during emergencies, but also helps them document the decisions they make.

When conservative treatment fails for patients who experience chronic pain in the coccyx when sitting or defecating, removing the coccyx is an option. Whatever the cause of the coccydynia, and whatever shows up or not on radiological investigations, coccygectomy can be helpful. Of 41 Danish patients who underwent the operation in one centre between 1993 and 2008, 33 reported excellent or good results and eight reported moderate or poor results. None experienced worse pain than before surgery (*Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery* 2010;92-B:242-5, doi:10.1302/0301-620X.92B2.23030).

The safest and most effective way to improve end stage cancer cachexia—measured in terms of lean body mass, resting energy expenditure, quality of life, appetite, and fatigue—is a combination of medroxyprogesterone, eicosapentaenoic acid, L-carnitine, and thalidomide. None of these drugs given alone was as good as a combination of the four in an Italian phase III randomised study with 332 assessable patients. The toxic effects of the agents were negligible and varied little between the different arms (*The Oncologist* 2010;15:200-11, doi:10.1634/theoncologist.2009-0153).

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A staging chest radiograph for a 67 year old woman awaiting bilateral mastectomy for carcinoma showed two rounded areas of increased lucency around the nipples. The patient had undergone bilateral injections for sentinel node localisation just before the radiograph was taken. Breast sentinel node localisation involves injection of a radionuclide adjacent to the nipple. The first lymph node to which the isotope travels is then removed for pathological evaluation. Chest radiography, when needed, should be done before this procedure to avoid artefacts arising from the radionuclide.

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Patient consent obtained.
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A new phenomenon has been reported by London based psychiatrists—self diagnosed bipolar disorder (*The Psychiatrist* 2010;34:103-5). The trend, they say, may have been triggered by increased media coverage of the disorder, coupled with the high social status of the celebrities who have been openly talking about their personal experiences of mental illness.

Once implantable cardioverter defibrillators (ICD) are in situ they need to be tested. But the repeated induction of ventricular fibrillation episodes has been linked with brain disturbances, the long term outcomes of which are unknown. In a prospective study, 52 recipients of ICDs completed standard

neuropsychological tests from three days before receiving their device to 12 months post-surgery. Short term memory and attention were vulnerable to changes in oxygen during ICD tests, but the good news is that these issues resolved for most patients by the end of the first year (*Circulation: Arrhythmia and Electrophysiology* 2010 doi:10.1161/circep.109.909580).

Rye bread could be a much more palatable and safer solution for mild constipation than laxatives or wheat bread, according to a study in the *Journal of Nutrition* (2010;140:534-41, doi:10.3945/jn.109.118570). The effects of rye bread and buttermilk (containing *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* GG) were compared with white wheat bread and laxatives, in 51 constipated adults. The rye bread contingency had faster gut transit time, increased frequency and ease of defecating, and softer stools, although adding buttermilk made no difference. Rye bread did not increase gastrointestinal adverse effects.

Orthopaedic surgeons propose two new clinical signs to distinguish between acute and healed vertebral fractures, which look identical on plain radiographs. In 83 patients with suspected acute osteoporotic vertebral compression fractures, two tests—closed-fist percussion and lying supine—were carried out and subsequently validated by magnetic resonance findings. The percussion test produces a sharp sudden pain with acute fractures and had a sensitivity of 87.5% and specificity of 90%, while lying supine is too painful to do with acute fractures, and had a sensitivity of 81.25% and specificity of 93.3% (*Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons* 2010;92:163-6, doi:10.1308/003588410X12518836440162).

Direct optic nerve damage caused by exposure to near-horizon sunshine may be an alternative to the low vitamin D level theory (due to lower ultraviolet levels), to explain the higher incidence of multiple sclerosis at high latitudes. The observed distribution of prevalence of multiple sclerosis fits well with the relative time that the sun spends within three and eight degrees of the horizon over the course of the year, while the correlation with total ultraviolet exposure was less convincing (*Medical Hypotheses* 2010;74:428-32, doi:10.1016/j.mehy.2009.09.054).

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