

The relationship between severe depression and the hippocampus is allegedly one of toxicity—the more intense the history of depression, the smaller the hippocampus. A large general practice study found a complex relation of duration of depression and memory function, which is specific to the hippocampus. Over 8000 patients in the study contributed to the conclusion that the duration of past depression does impair memory performance, and that there is a definite toxic link between the burden of depression and cognition (*American Journal of Psychiatry* 2008;165:731-9).

In Africa and Asia, vaccine coverage is not linked to parents' knowledge about vaccination, but resistance to vaccination almost always comes from parents' fear that they may be doing their children harm by getting them vaccinated. Should more resources be poured into improving knowledge? The answer is yes, but such education should be tailored locally because the findings from one population can't be extrapolated to the next (*Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 2008;86:419-20).

Tired doctors and organisational factors affect the efficiency of hospital care, but not death rates, conclude two studies summarised in *Circulation* (2008;117:2580-2). Both studies allowed for the influence of different days of the week, and both found that doctors being on call for short or long periods, or patients being admitted at weekends as opposed to weekdays, made no difference to death rates, though there were effects on lengths of stay and other delays. More high quality studies have looked at the effect of treatments than at organisational factors; it's time, says this editorial, to redress the balance.

Adverse events in acute healthcare settings are less likely to be prevented in patients who have communication problems (*CMAJ* 2008;178:1555-62). The odds ratio that a patient who had a preventable adverse event compared with no adverse event having a communication difficulty was 3 (95% CI 1.43 to 6.27), and that a patient had a psychiatric problem was 2.35 (1.09 to 5.05). The adverse events usually involved drug errors or clinical mismanagement.



A 59 year old woman had a colonoscopy for altered bowel habit and rectal bleeding. The only findings turned out to be a substantial amount of raspberry jelly, closely resembling polyps. Patients are advised in the instruction leaflet to only eat semi-solid food such as jelly and to drink plenty of fluids along with taking laxatives as preparation for the colonoscopy. We advocate eating colourless jelly only.

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The mnemonic TAHITI is used by a group of Australian ophthalmologists to help obtain informed consent from patients undergoing cataract surgery. T is the risk ("the terrible 1%"), A is the anaesthetic risk, H is haemorrhage, I is infection, T is technical problems, and I is inflammation. The mnemonic helps both patients and trainees, and the authors say it provides what the patient really wants to know before undergoing surgery (*Journal of Cataract and Refractive Surgery* 2008;34:180-8).

Where did the bacterium that causes Lyme disease in the United States and Europe originate? A genetic study examined the evolutionary history of *Borrelia burgdorferi* by sequencing eight of its "housekeeping" genes. Analysis of 64 samples of bacterial DNA taken from infected people in Europe and the US points to Europe as the likely source. What's surprising is that *B burgdorferi* is likely to have reached the US before humans did (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 2008;105:8730-5).

Latrodectism—widow spider bite—is common around the world, and it's particularly nasty in Australia, where it's caused by the redback spider. Most antivenom is given intravenously, but redback spider antivenom is usually given intramuscularly. Is one route better than the other? A randomised controlled trial in the *Quarterly Journal of Medicine* (2008;101:557-65) found little difference in effectiveness between the two routes—and that the antivenom may be no better than placebo.

Canadian scientists have found a way to fortify hard cheese with vitamin D. The bioavailability of vitamin D from the cheese was investigated by randomising 80 adults to eat weekly servings of fortified cheddar cheese, fortified low-fat cheese, liquid vitamin D supplement (with or without food), or placebo cheddar or placebo supplement. Both fortification and supplementation lowered serum parathyroid hormone, making cheese a good food to fortify (*Journal of Nutrition* 2008;138:1365-71).

The recent trend for left handed presidents looks set to continue, as both Barack Obama and his rival John McCain are left handers. Others before them were Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan (though he used his right hand for writing), George H W Bush, and Bill Clinton. Only 13% of the population is left handed, so this trend can't be put down simply to chance. Analysts are wondering what the connection is between being left handed and being a good leader. Left handed people are good problem solvers, perhaps because both cerebral hemispheres are used to visualise and evaluate situations (www.anythingleft-handed.co.uk/presidents.html).

Analysis of data from the stroke prevention by aggressive reduction in cholesterol levels study (SPARCL) shows that haemorrhagic stroke was more common in the group treated with high dose atorvastatin, in people with a haemorrhagic stroke at entry to the study, and in men and older participants. But risk of bleeding was not associated with baseline levels of low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, or with recent levels of LDL cholesterol in treated patients (*Neurology* 2008;70:2364-70).

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